

# SUMMIT DAILY

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## Opinion: It's time for Sen. Gardner to support the CORE Act

Opinion **OPINION** | 4h ago

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**Karn Stiegelmeier**

As commissioners in Eagle and Summit counties, we appreciate Sen. Cory Gardner joining the majority of the Colorado delegation in supporting the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, which secured full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Unfortunately, because of Gardner's inaction, Colorado has not been able to celebrate significant new protections for our public lands during his time in the U.S. Senate while many of our Western state neighbors have seen hundreds of thousands of acres of new public lands protected. We encourage Gardner to finally become a strong advocate for the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act.

There is broad bipartisan public support in Colorado for the protection of our public lands. Coloradans know they draw visitors from all over the world who support the growing and important outdoor recreation economies of the state and many Western communities, including Eagle and Summit counties. These lands provide the foundation for a unique way of life for residents.

The CORE Act would protect 400,000 acres of Colorado public land and provide new recreation, wildlife and conservation management areas that preserve existing outdoor uses such as hiking, mountain lands, waters and forests. The majority of Colorado's congressional delegation supports it, and the U.S. House of Representatives passed the measure twice with bipartisan support.

It's possible to get the CORE Act passed in this Congress. In July, the bill passed the House for the second time. It was incorporated into the National Defense Authorization Act, must-pass legislation that has included public lands protections in the past, like in early 2015 when

Congress passed the Hermosa Creek Watershed Protection Act. Seemingly the only man standing in the way is Gardner, as his lack of support has stalled the bill in the Senate.

COVID-19 has hit our mountain communities very hard. Many are struggling with high unemployment. Before the pandemic, 229,000 jobs in Colorado were in the outdoor recreation economy. As local elected officials working very hard to help our region's economy recover, we know that passing the CORE Act will not only permanently protect our public lands but also will help get people back to work. The value of our public lands is apparent as people throughout the state and country flock to our mountains for solace in times of distress. Public lands support the physical, mental and emotional health of us all.

For decades, local communities have been calling for the protection of historic sites, recreation areas, unspoiled wilderness lands, waterways and wildlife habitat through individual pieces of legislation that have now been united and refined in the CORE Act. Diverse stakeholders, including ranchers, sportsmen, small business owners, veterans, local elected officials, outdoor recreation organizations, and water and energy groups collaborated on this effort. Yet Gardner has failed to work with Coloradans to move this land protection bill forward, side-stepping by saying, "I won't oppose it." His unwillingness to actively support the CORE Act has prevented the bill from advancing in the Senate.

The CORE Act includes a first-of-its-kind National Historic Landscape at Camp Hale to honor Colorado's military legacy and the history of Colorado's 10th Mountain Division, a unique and powerful tribute to those who have served our country. The last living members of the 10th Mountain Division have [called on Gardner to support this effort](#) to protect these lands in perpetuity before they pass.

As we celebrate the recent passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, we urge Gardner to show Coloradans that he truly cares about these vitally important public lands — the backbone of our mountain communities — by advocating for the CORE Act in the Senate and publicly supporting passage of the bill this year. This bill will protect our public lands and outdoor recreation opportunities while boosting the economy as we recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We implore the senator to work actively with leadership to ensure that this Congress passes the CORE Act.

*Stiegelmeier is a fifth generation Coloradan and has been a county commissioner since 2009. Chandler-Henry is a fourth generation Coloradan and has been a commissioner since 2013.*