



The Indian Peaks Wilderness, Boulder County.



Eldorado Canyon State Park, Boulder County.

Healthy Parks, Healthy People

More Coloradans are heading outside. It's time to invest in our green spaces by fully funding the Land & Water Conservation Fund.

A surge in visitors to public lands across Colorado during the COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated just how much we crave the outdoors. With visitor numbers expected to remain high, we need to create more opportunities for outdoor recreation and better protect the ones we have. This means fully and permanently funding America's most important conservation program: the Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

Time outdoors is vital for our health

Staying indoors takes its toll on our mental and physical health.¹ Research shows that time spent in green spaces reduces anxiety and depression, improves concentration and memory, and helps keep our immune systems healthy.

Park visitor numbers have soared during the pandemic

With lockdowns in effect across Colorado, thousands have headed outdoors for respite.

- Nearly 875,000 people visited Colorado's state parks in March – a 40 percent increase over March 2019. In April, that number rose to over a million.
- In March and April combined, visitation at state parks in Colorado's northeast region alone increased nearly 48 percent over the same period in 2019.
- With parks filled to capacity, some have had to close altogether, including public land near the Boulder Creek Path, state park beaches, and the swim beach and marina at Big Soda Lake in Bear Creek Lake Park.



Hikers on the Ute Trail in Rocky Mountain National Park.



Beachgoers at Bear Creek Lake Park.

¹ For a full list of sources, visit <https://environmentcolorado.org/page/coe/lwcf-factsheet-sources>

Access to the outdoors requires funding public lands

Surging demand for outdoor recreation during the pandemic reflects the public's desire for open spaces, while also placing new demands on public lands.

- Parks have had to meet increased demand with inadequate and declining revenue from taxes and diminished income due to campsite closures.
- Staff have had to take on additional responsibilities and tackle new needs, from safety concerns to maintenance due to damage to park lands from overuse. Parks have also needed new infrastructure, including signage, parking, and trail systems able to accommodate social distancing.

To expand outdoor access, fully fund the Land & Water Conservation Fund

The Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is America's most important federal funding program for public lands. LWCF uses offshore drilling royalties to fund land purchases by the National Park Service and other federal agencies. It has also channeled billions of dollars into more than 41,000 state and local park projects, including hiking trails, bike paths and campgrounds.

LWCF is authorized to accrue \$900 million annually to make available for conservation projects. But Congress has historically siphoned off much of this money to fill budget holes elsewhere. In total, less than half of the \$40.9 billion accrued in LWCF since 1965 has been used for the purposes for which it was intended.

In recent years, Colorado's annual LWCF grant allocation for state and regional parks projects has been around \$750,000. If LWCF were to receive full funding, roughly twice as much money could flow toward protecting Colorado's vital outdoor areas.

LWCF has protected some of Colorado's most treasured places

Many of the public lands Coloradans enjoy have been protected with funding from LWCF. More than \$270 million in LWCF grants have helped pay for the purchase and maintenance of public lands across Colorado, including:

- **The Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve:** \$26.3 million from LWCF has ensured that these historic landscapes are accessible to the public and protected from development.
- **Continental Divide National Scenic Trail:** \$700,000 in LWCF grants has enabled recreation access, habitat conservation and maintenance on the trail.
- **Rocky Mountain National Park:** Grants totaling \$8.7 million have ensured that the public has access to these spectacular lands and funded maintenance, preservation and trail-building in the park.
- More than 1,000 LWCF grants totaling over \$63 million have supported hundreds of **state and local park projects**, including the development of trails in Lory and Cheyenne Mountain state parks and land acquisitions at Roxborough, Golden Gate Canyon and Boyd Lake State Parks.

Funding for parks supports our outdoor economy

The surge in demand for access to public lands can also help support Colorado's economic recovery. Outdoor recreation generates \$28 billion in consumer spending in Colorado, 229,000 jobs, and \$2 billion in state and local tax revenue every year.



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