

REMOVING OBSTACLES TO GUARANTEED FUNDING FOR THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

Passed: 68-30

SUMMARY:

The Senate voted to waive a law and Senate procedural rules that would have blocked a bill to guarantee substantial annual funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and address the public lands maintenance backlog. (*June 15, 2020, Roll Call No. 118*)

BACKGROUND:

Congress established the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) more than 50 years ago to acquire needed lands for our national wildlife refuges, forests, parks, and Bureau of Land Management lands and to create local and state parks. The LWCF was intended to be set aside as a special account with funding from specific sources, first from the federal motorboat fuel tax and surplus property sales and with the later addition of revenues from oil and gas leases on the Outer Continental Shelf to reach a yearly total of \$900 million. However, the funds were still subject to the annual appropriations process, and while \$900 million was deposited into the LWCF every year, Congress regularly diverted the monies for other purposes leaving an unappropriated balance on paper of approximately \$22 billion.

H.R. 1957, the Great American Outdoors Act was introduced in the House by Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) to ensure that the full \$900 million would be spent directly for LWCF purposes each year and to provide for the maintenance backlog on our public lands. The Senate took up H.R. 1957 after it was passed by the House. While under consideration on the Senate floor, Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY) raised a point of order pursuant to Senate budget rules that would have required an offset – a change in spending or revenues elsewhere – to pay for the funding provided by H.R. 1957. However, proponents of the bill argued that an offset was not necessary given that specific funding sources had historically been designated for LWCF but diverted to other purposes. Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO) moved to waive all applicable sections of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 and applicable budget resolutions that would have required an offset for the legislation, a move which would require an affirmative vote from 60 Senators.

OUTCOME:

On June 15, 2020, the Senate agreed to the Gardner motion, 68-30. “Yes” was the pro-conservation vote.