

My Turn

Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund needs reauthorization

Sen. Martin Heinrich

The Taos News, 10/1/2015

Just last week, the final piece of the Miranda Canyon property was set aside for protection as part of the Carson National Forest. This addition of historic and scenic land will bring new economic activity and recreation opportunities to the Taos area. It will also conserve a vital local water supply.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund helped pay for this newly protected outdoor space for us all to enjoy. After local community leaders called for permanent protection of Miranda Canyon to prevent damage to Taos' drinking water supply, the Forest Service protected the area with funding from LWCF.

Established 51 years ago, LWCF is one of America's most successful conservation programs, opening up key areas for hunting, fishing and other recreational access. From coast to coast, LWCF has preserved our outdoor heritage, protected clean air and precious supplies of drinking water, and supported millions of jobs.

You don't have to look hard in New Mexico to see LWCF's impact. Across our state, you can thank LWCF for protecting some of our most treasured public lands such as the Valles Caldera National Preserve, Ute Mountain, and Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge. These are the places that make New Mexico special.

In the Taos area, LWCF has protected parts of the new Rio Grande Del Norte National Monument — a place my family and I love to visit every chance we get. Local communities like Taos, Questa and Ojo Caliente have also used LWCF grant money to build neighborhood parks and sports facilities for schools. All of these places improve the quality of life for local residents and attract visitors, helping to boost the local economy. Not surprising, LWCF has tremendous support from small businesses. Outdoor recreation activities generate \$6.1 billion annually in consumer spending and are directly responsible for 68,000 jobs in our state. In April, 62 New Mexico businesses wrote a letter to Congress backing full funding and permanent authorization of LWCF.

LWCF expired at the end of September and Congress must act quickly to reauthorize and fully fund it.

LWCF is funded through royalties from federal offshore leases of publicly owned oil and gas. The program provides funding for additions to national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests and other federal public lands. It's the principal source of funds for federal acquisition of lands for outdoor recreation, habitat preservation and protection of special natural, cultural and historic resources.

As a member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I've worked to permanently reauthorize and fully fund LWCF. Earlier this year, I introduced legislation to do just that. Fully funding this critical program is essential if we are to use the revenue for its intended purpose. Because it is funded by the permanent depletion of our energy resources, LWCF is meant to support permanent investments in conservation and recreation. The fund receives around \$900 million each year, but in recent years Congress has only appropriated a little over \$300 million.

I will continue to fight for the Land and Water Conservation Fund in the Senate so that all of our children and grandchildren can continue to come back to these special outdoor places year after year, generation after generation.

U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich is a Democrat representing New Mexico.



U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-NM, fishing in the Valles Caldera.

Courtesy Photo