

Is the Department of Interior disrupting the Great American Outdoors Act?

Written by Staff Reports

Friday, 04 December 2020 06:02



Or is this just a difference of opinion?

Durango, Colo. — The Department of Interior issued a Secretarial Order regarding the implementation of the Land and Water Conservation Fund and [The Great American Outdoors Act](#) Nov. 13.

Anna Peterson, Executive Director of The Mountain Pact, believes the Order adds a litany of new provisions that weaken the Act, such as:

Allowing state veto of federal public land protection projects;

Eliminating funding for Bureau of Land Management land acquisition; and

Restricting future LWCF funds from helping to create new units of public land

The Department of the Interior offers a different characterization of the Secretary's Order 3388.

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On its web site, in a press release dated Nov. 13, the DOI says key components of the Order include:

Prioritization of investments that increase public access for recreation, enhanced conservation and support of the recovery of endangered species.

An increase in flexibility for how states and local communities spend and match LWCF grants

Honors the Interior department's commitment to be a good neighbor by giving states and communities a voice in federal land acquisition.

Peterson issued the following statement:

"The process and expectations for the Land and Water Conservation Fund that Congress set forth in the Great American Outdoors Act were simple and clear. In this landmark legislation, Congress asked only one thing of this administration on LWCF: Meet the deadline for submitting a specific FY2021 program allocations and project lists, which they did not do.

"Now the Department of Interior has decided instead to rewrite the law on LWCF in ways that exceed its authority and defy Congress.

"Congress has repeatedly voted down arbitrary restrictions like those in the Interior Department's new orders by passing the Dingell Act and the Great American Outdoors Act by overwhelming bipartisan margins. Point blank: the majority of Americans and Congress want the full and legal implementation of one of the best pieces of conservation legislation in our lifetime. That means keeping existing LWCF frameworks in place, guaranteeing it the full and permanent \$900 million intended for it by law.

"DOI has effectively ignored the intent of the Great American Outdoors Act, which passed the Senate by an overwhelming 73-25 vote, even though it has been one of America's best

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conservation programs bringing together both sides of the aisle with five decades of bi-partisan support and thousands of local parks, trails, and ballparks to show for it.

“This Secretarial Order is an intentional violation of Congress, in a last-minute effort to block the successful implementation of the Land and Water Conservation Fund and cement the anti-LWCF views we’ve seen from this administration for the past four years,” Peterson concluded.

For her part, Margaret Everson, counselor to the Secretary of the Interior and chair of the Great American Outdoors Act Task Force said, “We are committed to managing these resources in partnership with the states and others in the conservation community.”