

United States Senate

October 30, 2018

COMMITTEES
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND
FORESTRY
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL
RESOURCES
HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
INDIAN AFFAIRS

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-230 United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
S-221 United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul D. Ryan
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan, and Minority Leader Pelosi:

As we enter the remaining weeks of the 115th Congress, I urge passage of several Montana priorities in any public lands legislative package or other legislative vehicle that emerges. This Congress, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee has done good, bipartisan work to report nearly 100 bills important to many states, especially in the West that await enactment. At a time when bipartisanship gets lost in the public eye, I find it critical for the Senate and House to produce tangible and meaningful results for the American people and place politics aside, regardless of the election outcome this fall. The priorities listed below have been favorably reported in a bipartisan way from the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and present that opportunity:

S. 569, Land and Water Conservation Authorization and Funding Act: I urge permanent reauthorization and full-funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). This program has proven time and time again to be an important land management tool in Montana. The LWCF facilitates public access to public lands and provides certainty for loggers who improve the health of our National Forests, create high-paying jobs and bring other economic benefits to our rural communities through the Forest Legacy program. LWCF enables ranchers to pass on their operations to future generations with certainty provided by conservation easements. The program helps resolve checker-board land management difficulties through targeted acquisitions from willing sellers and creates outdoor recreation opportunities closer to town like hiking or climbing at Bozeman Pass and fishing access sites across the state. A program this important to land management and our way of life in the West must not lapse for much longer, is worthy of permanent reauthorization and must be fully-funded.

S. 3172, the Restore our Parks Act: As the Chairman of the Subcommittee on National Parks, a Bozeman native who grew up in the shadows of Yellowstone National Park, I believe it is also critical that we take care of our nation's National Parks in any public lands legislative package. Our National Parks have helped generate \$3.2 billion in consumer spending in Montana alone,

mostly near our National Parks. Nationwide, consumers spent \$18.2 billion in gateway communities. At the same time, National Park Service currently estimates the deferred maintenance backlog to be approximately \$11.6 billion. In my home state of Montana, our current backlog is about \$217.5 million, with the largest portion, \$153.8 million, at Glacier National Park. The projects are varied, but they all, ultimately, impact the visitor experience. S. 3172 would immediately inject much-needed revenue to address our National Parks failing infrastructure and I urge its inclusion.


S. 941, Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act: S. 941 would withdraw 30,000 acres neighboring Yellowstone National Park from mineral entry and leasing laws. While responsible mineral development can and should occur in my state, right outside the gates of Yellowstone National Park is not the right place to mine, where the local community opposes large-scale mining in order to protect their local economy reliant on outdoor recreation and tourism. S. 941 would provide permanent assurance the Paradise Valley and Gardiner Basin will be protected from large-scale mining.

S. 2160, Protect Collaboration for Healthier Forests Act: I also urge inclusion of my legislation to allow disputes over collaboratively-developed forest management projects in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming to be resolved through a credible, well-defined arbitration program rather than in the courtroom. A pilot arbitration program will bring about swifter resolutions to disputes and faster implementation of approved projects that reduce the risk of wildfire. The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee recently passed this legislation with bipartisan support, and it is supported by the U.S. Forest Service.

S. 685, Clean Water for Rural Communities Act: Today there are still communities in Montana that lack access to clean, reliable drinking water. For more than a dozen years these communities have been fighting for approval of their projects and it's time for that fight to come to an end. My bill would authorize the Musselshell-Judith Rural Water System, which will facilitate water treatment and delivery to more than 4,500 Montanans in portions of Judith Basin, Wheatland, Golden Valley, Musselshell, Fergus, and Yellowstone Counties. The bill would also authorize the Dry-Redwater Regional Water Authority System to continue working with the Bureau of Reclamation to complete their feasibility study. Water is life's most basic necessity and passage of this bill would finally help bring these rural Montanan's long fight to a close.

Thank you for your consideration of these priorities and thank you in advance for your commitment to put politics aside and enact bipartisan legislation that will improve stewardship of our iconic public lands, resources, and wildlife in the West.

Sincerely,


STEVE DAINES
U.S. Senator

CC: The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, The Honorable Maria Cantwell