

**Opening Statement**  
**Senator Susan Collins**  
**The Great American Outdoors Act**  
**June 11, 2020**  
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I am pleased to join my colleagues in supporting the Great American Outdoors Act, a bill to provide full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and to address the deferred maintenance backlog for our nation's public lands. Under the expert leadership of Senators Gardner, Manchin, and Daines – fifty-nine bipartisan Senators have cosponsored this legislation that will allow landowners, states, local communities, and conservation partners to plan for the future and to restore our national parks.

Mr. President, more than fifty years ago, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act established America's most successful conservation and outdoor recreation program – there is truly nothing else like it. The Fund was designed to assure that outdoor recreation lands would be secured for future generations.

I remember in one of my first years in the Senate working with my colleague from Colorado, Senator and later Secretary of Interior, Ken Salazar, as we sought to boost the funding for the stateside part of the program. Mr. President, if you look at a map of the United States and put a pin in every place where there was a land and water conservation stateside supported program, you would find that every single county in the country had at least one project. Oftentimes, people do not realize that that local ballpark or the trails that run along a local stream or lake are the results of funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. And those are projects that are designed by local people, selected by local people, and then the federal government helps in the funding to acquire and maintain the land.

Just last year, this important program was permanently authorized. And now, we have the opportunity to ensure for the American people that this program will have consistent funding to play the strongest possible role in preserving open spaces, special lands, and revitalizing communities for years to come.

Investments in this landmark conservation program supports access to the outdoors for all Americans, as the LWCF has invested in literally every county in the U.S. Its funding has been used to open up key areas for hunting, fishing, and other recreational access; to support working forests and ranches; to acquire inholdings and protect critical lands in national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, Civil War battlefields and other federal areas; and as I mentioned, my favorite part of the program, which is the stateside part of the program, which supports state and local projects from ball parks to recreational trails.

Over the last five decades, Maine has received more than \$191 million in funding from LWCF. Examples of this funding include the Cold Stream Forest, a Forest Legacy project in Somerset County to preserve a beautiful area that continues the long and proud Maine traditions of conservation, public access to recreation, and working forests; in addition, we have the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in southern Maine, where once an undeveloped 110-acre tract

along the coast in Biddeford was preserved for natural habitat and expanded recreational access. Of the more than 850 Land and Water Conservation Funds sites in Maine, 650 are community-based projects, from Riverside Park in Fort Kent in northern Maine to Haley Soccer Fields in Kittery, right near the New Hampshire border. Mr. President, I want to repeat that statistic again, out of the 850 Land and Water Conservation Funds sites in Maine, 650 are community-based projects, like the park in Fort Kent to the soccer fields in Kittery I mentioned.

In its more than 50-year history, however, this program has been funded only twice at the authorized level of \$900 million. I believe Congress should fully fund this program to deliver on the promise that was made to the American people, back in 1964, to take a portion of the proceeds from natural resource development, such as offshore oil drilling, and invest in conservation and outdoor recreation.

I do want to recognize the work that two of my colleagues, who have other ideas, Senator Cassidy and Senator Whitehouse, for bringing up the issue of funding for coastal states. Representing a coastal state, I agree that we need to do more for our coastal states and I support their efforts to ensure additional funding can be directed to coastal states and coastal communities. I believe, however, regrettably, that that issue is going to have to be dealt with at a later time, but I do support their effort.

Furthermore, another important piece of this bill addresses our deferred maintenance backlog on our nation's public lands. Now what I'm most interested here is our national parks, our national parks have a huge maintenance backlog and that include Acadia National Park, a true gem of a park on the coast of Maine where we have seen record numbers of visitors in recent years. This bill will help Acadia National Park tackle the more than \$60 million of maintenance backlog work on trails, roads, bridges, and buildings to ensure that every visitor can experience the absolute beauty of this true gem of a park on the Maine coastline.

Mr. President, I would urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this important legislation. Thank you Mr. President.

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