

**Remarks for Governor Steve Bullock
Conservation in the West Keynote
February 20, 2020 – Colorado Springs, CO**

****As prepared for delivery****

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to join you for the 10th annual release of the Conservation in the West Poll.

Thank you to Mr. Townsend for the introduction—please pass along my thanks to Jill for the invitation to be here. I also want to acknowledge Corina McKendry, State of the Rockies Project Faculty Director for her leadership and lastly, I want to extend my appreciation to former Professor Walt Hecox.

Walt launched the State of the Rockies Project 16 years ago and the Conservation in the West Poll six years later with a firm belief that Colorado College had an important independent voice to offer our region, cataloguing our changes and our responses, and offering students one-of-a-kind research experiences along the way.

The program has had an incredible impact, both through the poll and the impact that students have made serving our region in their careers. It's a pleasure to be here to celebrate all of those accomplishments as the program looks to the future.

When I realized I had an opportunity to brag about Montana in Colorado, I knew it wasn't something I could pass up.

Kidding aside, Colorado's unrivaled outdoor experiences make it one of the most spectacular places in the nation – a close 2nd to Montana – and it's an incredible honor to be here to celebrate your public lands and all of the many values we share together out here in the West.

Unlike no place else in our country, I think that folks out West have a special appreciation for our public lands.

We know our public lands are our heritage. They are our birthright. They are our great equalizer. Meaning it doesn't matter the size of your checkbook, our public lands and access to them are for everyone.

You don't need to be a millionaire from Aspen, Sun Valley, Jackson Hole or Big Sky to hike on these lands or camp with your family in your favorite park.

Our public lands belong to all of us.

From Colorado, to Montana, to Idaho, to Arizona, to Utah, we know that every American has an equal ownership stake in public lands.

We are blessed to have so many national treasures surround us in the West, but these lands belong to the entire country. And while these lands may be equally owned, the economics they generate belong to us.

The fight to preserve our public lands is not just a historic one, it's an economic one.

There are obvious economics of tourism and a thriving outdoor recreation industry. Last year, we had nearly 13 million people visit Montana. And they're not coming for our Walmart's. They're coming to explore our wild places.

Montana's outdoor recreation economy delivers over \$7.1 billion in annual consumer spending and employs over 71,000 people each year – a major economic force for our state.

In Colorado, that's \$28 billion in consumer spending and 229,000 direct jobs.

People want to live and work and raise families in Montana in large part because of our public lands. And I can sure bet it's the same way all throughout the Rocky Mountain West.

But what makes us even more special out West – our lands are part of the traditional family values we pass down from generation to generation. Just like our grandparents and parents did for us, our children and our children’s children will know what it’s like growing up watching the stars.

I’ll bet that each of you here have had incredible memories or unforgettable stories from adventures you’ve had on public land.

The first date I went on with the former high school classmate that became my wife Lisa, was a picnic in the south hills of Helena, minutes from what is now our front door.

The first summit my three kids bagged was Mount Ascension, a part of the open space preserved by a land trust, also right on the edge of town.

I am fortunate to take my son Cameron hunting on our public lands nearly every year, often successful in downing a buck.

Whether it’s falling in love on a picnic while on a trail hike, your kids’ first summit climb, or an unforgettable hunt, these are the memories that shape and define us as Westerners – and as Americans.

Those who came before us had the foresight to maintain our history, our outdoor legacy, the memories that define us.

They knew then what we know now: Setting lands aside for the public’s benefit is one of America’s greatest ideas. And it’s an idea that can and must survive generations.

As Theodore Roosevelt said in 1910:

“Of all the questions which can come before this nation, short of the actual preservation of its existence in a great war, there is none which compares in importance with the great central task of leaving this land an even better land for our descendants than it is for us.”

Now, it’s up to us to pay it forward and to make sure that future generations have the opportunity to wander, to contemplate, to create lifelong memories on our prized public lands.

But make no mistake, our public lands are under attack – and along with it, our clean air, our clean water, our wildlife, and the very values that define us out West.

There are those who are actively working to erode our parks and forests and undermine access. There are individuals and corporate interests that want to try to transfer or sell off our public lands.

There continues to be troubling signs coming out of Washington D.C.

Just a couple of weeks ago, The Trump Administration finalized plans to open up two of Utah’s national monuments for drilling and mining.

This is the largest elimination of protected public lands in U.S. history – acting in defiance of over 100 years of history, of sixteen presidents designating 157 national monuments, dating all the way back to 1906, when Theodore Roosevelt first used the Antiquities Act to protect Devils Tower in Wyoming.

An attack on Utah’s public lands is an attack on all of us out West, and all across the country. An attack on public lands anywhere is an attack on public lands everywhere, and it flies in the face of who we are as a nation.

And just last week, the President unveiled a 97 percent cut to the Land and Water Conservation Fund in his budget proposal.

Since 1965, Montana has received over \$38 million in Land and Water Conservation funds to protect and enhance local and state outdoor spaces. The future of investment in the outdoor recreation assets that sustain our economy and livelihoods depends on the full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Yet, Congress has failed time and time again to fully fund the LWCF at its authorized \$900 million. And now, on paper, the President wants to cut it to a measly \$14.7 million.

I often say that a budget is reflection of our values – from our households, to the state house, to the White House. Instead, the President is undermining our values, decimating a budget that every single state from coast-to-coast relies on to keep our lands and outdoor recreation opportunities resilient.

At the same time Washington is chasing its tail, we are undergoing profound changes in our region, impacting traditional jobs and energy sources that have powered our economy and the very environment and climate around us.

In Montana, our temperatures are 3 degrees warmer on average than they were just a few decades ago. January was the hottest month, globally, in recorded history dating back 141 years.

Across the West, early spring runoff is impacting our water availability and causing flooding. Prolonged drought and early winters are exacerbating an unpredictable trade environment for our farmers and ranchers.

Our fire seasons are by some estimates 78 days longer than they were just 30 years ago and by most accounts they are more severe.

In 2017, not only did we have our largest fire season on record in Montana since the big burn of 1910, we had our most expensive season on record. We had double the incidence of respiratory related ER visits in affected counties. We endured periodic waves of evacuations. And tragically, we lost the lives of two wildland firefighters.

The state lost up to 800,000 visitors due to 2017 fires and smoke, resulting in a loss of \$240.5 million in visitor spending.

I know Colorado has a similar story to tell from just a few seasons ago, including the Waldo Canyon Fire and its devastating impacts here in Colorado Springs.

Yet there are those who want to deny our climate is changing, before our very eyes. There are those who choose inaction, who purposely sideline us in gridlock instead of making the change we need to move forward.

On so many of the challenging issues we face as a region, citizens of the Rocky Mountain West are uniquely capable of collaborating to find shared solutions. Because of the void in leadership nationally, we're being called on to chart a pragmatic and thoughtful approach forward.

One of the great joys of my job has been the opportunity to bring together diverse Montanans, spanning industry, hunters and anglers, conservation groups, working landowners, and local officials in service of solving some of our most difficult policy challenges—like developing a plan to protect greater sage grouse from an endangered species act listing, or advancing efforts to further the restoration and management of our National Forests, or developing a plan for our state to prepare for and respond to global climate change.

I have tremendous faith in the capacity and values of our region's citizens. In this age of political polarization, our return to shared values and our work to conserve our region's natural heritage and public lands is precisely what we need to chart a path forward.

It was over a century ago Theodore Roosevelt gave us the “great central task of leaving this land an even better land.” Today, that task faces the greatest threats that we have seen in our lifetimes.

And don’t kid yourself, these threats to our public lands are real. But with every threat, comes a greater duty and responsibility to ramp up our focus on protecting our natural resources.

It’s a responsibility we share together, and one we can and must do together. And indeed, it is a responsibility we are recommitting to here today.

It’s up to us to tell Washington D.C. to keep their hands off our public lands.

It’s up to us to make sure public land giveaways don’t happen.

It’s up to us to make responsible decisions at every turn, to not make the mistakes that will saddle our future generations.

It’s also up to us to do so much more than just playing defense.

We often hear that all politics are local. Take that one step further and you realize that at times, politics are deeply personal. As I alluded to earlier, mine is a lifetime of memories forged by the landscape of Montana. It only makes sense that Lisa and I choose to raise our three kids in Montana, to give them the same remarkable childhood we had.

Mine is a story told over and over again – minus the becoming governor part.

So when I see moves to take away our public lands, it’s not political for me. It’s personal.

It’s hard not to believe that we face some of the most difficult tests of our time. They are tests we cannot afford to fail. Tests that will determine whether my kids or yours will be able to experience the Rocky Mountain West and all it has to offer, just like we are able to now.

Being here today with you gives me hope that we will not fail.

On the 10th anniversary of the Conservation in the West Poll, I think of the foresight of those before us who knew that our public lands are not a Democrat ideal or a Republican ideal. Neither is it Libertarian or Vegetarian. It's an American ideal, formed in bipartisanship and protected through our focus working together.

The Conservation in the West Poll is critical to highlighting the voices of many of us in the West – with unique, diverse perspectives, but in unity of the values our lands bring to us and our fight in conserving them.

We can be inspired by the overwhelming majority of Westerners who label themselves as “conservationists.” Who consider the stances of elected officials on issues of public lands and conservation as critical to their decisions at the ballot box.

We come from all walks of life, but we can all agree on one thing: America's greatest idea is indeed worth protecting.

Today we recommit ourselves to doing everything we can to protect, preserve, and promote our national treasures.

Thank you for all of the work you've put into this year, the past ten, and that you will continue to do in the future.

I thank you. And – of greater significance – my kids thank you.

###