



June 9, 2020

NTU urges all Senators to vote “NO” on H.R. 1957, the Great American Outdoors Act, without amendments to improve the underlying bill. This legislation would divert energy development revenues currently devoted to the General Fund to a new, specific fund for deferred maintenance, and would transition the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) from discretionary spending to mandatory spending. Congress should resist the urge to make discretionary funds mandatory, and pass amendments to the bill that would improve its fiscal position and avoid diverting General Fund revenues.

National Taxpayers Union understands that some Senators feel the need to address the maintenance backlog for federally owned and managed lands. However, the ideal policy solution is not to divert energy development revenues currently devoted to the Treasury’s General Fund, given the federal government is already running deficits in the trillions of dollars for fiscal year (FY) 2020. Senators should instead consider amendments that reverse this diversion of General Fund revenues, such as the amendment from Senate Budget Committee Chairman Mike Enzi (R-WY) that would eliminate the maintenance backlog with very modest fee increases. While a fee increase may also not be the ideal solution, we appreciate Chairman Enzi’s effort to make sure fee increases are paid by the actual visitors to federal lands, those who create the need for regular park and land maintenance.

More problematic in this legislation is the transition of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) from discretionary spending to mandatory spending. This would add around \$900 million per year to the federal government’s mandatory obligations, and would add LWCF to a long list of mandatory federal programs whose funding levels should be assessed, debated, and reassessed as discretionary spending from year to year. The Great American Outdoors Act would take lawmakers in the opposite direction they need to go, and would further separate Congress from its constitutional authority over federal spending and tax measures. Senators should consider amendments that would remove Section 3 from the bill, thereby keeping LWCF as a discretionary spending program.

Absent amendments like the ones mentioned above, we urge all Senators to oppose the Great American Outdoors Act, and go back to the drawing board on this bill.

Roll call votes on H.R. 1957 will be included in NTU’s annual Rating of Congress and a “NO” vote will be considered the pro-taxpayer position.

If you have any questions, please contact NTU Policy and Government Affairs Manager Andrew Lautz at alautz@ntu.org.
