

## U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

### Senate Floor Speech ahead of final Senate passage of *Great American Outdoors Act*

June 17, 2020

CANTWELL: Mr. President, I come to join my colleagues to talk about the final passage of the *Great American Outdoors Act*, and to discuss what it really means to all of us. Obviously, the great outdoors means a lot to the state of Washington, nobody probably needs that explained to them—although recently I read a quote from George Vancouver when he was discovering the Pacific Northwest, even in his remarks he was so astounded that this was such a beautiful place. So it tells you that it lasts for generations, and that’s what this bill is about. It is making it last for generations beyond us.

And so I want to thank the bipartisan effort of five Democrats and five Republicans who joined together to originally put the parks backlog and maintenance together with fully funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

People should realize that the Land and Water Conservation Fund, over its history—and I’ve followed it pretty closely, because you know Scoop Jackson, the longtime senator from the state of Washington and the original sponsor of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, he understood that America was urbanizing and we needed to make an investment in open space. And that open space gives us park and recreational area, but it has literally provided five million acres of protected land since its inception. So five million acres of land throughout the United States of America that we can identify in every state of the United States to give Americans access to open space.

I mentioned Gas Works Park in the state of Washington in Settle because it’s so iconic and people, I don’t think, could think that Lake Union would be the same without Gas Works Park. So what a great idea by the leader of our Congress at the time, to pass the Land and Water Conservation Act.

And so we’ve had a fight really, literally, in the last, I’d say ten or fifteen years, of people who didn’t want to fully fund, or even support the Land and Water Conservation Act. In fact two years ago, we had let it expire and people were in an argument about how to reauthorize it. People then wanted to say, “we don’t really want to do new land, we just want to take care of the backlog.” And so that debate went on for a time, and I think we really tried to emphasize the great economy related to the outdoors. Because not only taking this revenue from oil and gas offshoring to putting it into land conservation has been a big win for the American people. Not only did they get open space and be able to recreate, but it puts money back into our economy as well because the outdoor economy is a big juggernaut at \$877 billion dollars.

And so the thing that we’re doing today is really ending this debate, ending this paradigm that has existed between some members who have said “oh yeah, I care about the parks that are already there, and maybe we should take care of the backlog, but I don’t want any new money or money going to the Land and Water Conservation Fund.” The Land and Water Conservation

Fund has dedicated, across the United States, five million acres to open space for all Americans to enjoy. That is a big win.

And ending this debate, and ending this, I would say, a not right directed discussion that tried to pit land against one another. And basically people who didn't want more open space and public land, I think we're ending that debate on a very firm note today that says, the United States Senate really believes that open space is a great driver of our economy, but more important, and essential aspect of American life, and we're going to continue to invest in it.

For us in the state of Washington, we have received something like \$700 million dollars over the life of this project since the '60s, and with this legislation today, basically making sure the Land and Water Conservation dollars collected from offshore oil revenue is spent in the Land and Water Conservation Fund, we will receive hundreds of millions more, between 200 and 300 million more, in land and water conservation investment.

I can't wait to see what that does for us in the Northwest. As I said, starting with George Vancouver and on down to today, everybody in the Northwest knows that the environment is so precious to us. It is great for its restorative value, but it's also great for our economy. So we want to keep it, and we want to keep investing in it.

The backlog in maintenance that we're talking about is a phenomenal investment, and I encourage all my colleagues to visit Mount Rainier sometime if they're in the Pacific Northwest, you can drive up to Paradise and visit. But those roads, the facilities there, they need maintenance. Even several years ago, we used the Land and Water Conservation Fund for the Carbon River improvement on a road that kept washing out every year. And now we moved it to higher ground, expanding the park, so making it more beneficial for people to go to that side of the mountain as well.

So I'm reminded what Teddy Roosevelt said, that "The nation behaves well if it treats its natural resources as an asset." We must in turn, turn that over to the next generation increased and not impaired in value. So that's what we're doing today, Mr. President, is returning that value to the next generation.

So I want to specifically thank Senator Manchin for his leadership on our side of the aisle on this. Having sponsored this legislation myself two years ago with Senator Burr and getting it out of the committee, we were sad to see that it got stuck on the Senate floor. So we're glad that this coalition of five Democrats and five Republicans, led by Senator Gardner, has managed to get it to this point.

And I also want to mention that Senator Burr's leadership over the last two Congresses—actually all the way back to 2010 where he fought to make sure that this Land and Water Conservation legislation was reauthorized and that we make this investment—has played a pivotal role making sure that people understand what that investment means to the United States.

So, a huge day for public lands in the United States Senate. A huge day to say that Americans will be getting more open space, and that our parks will be getting a little bit of a facelift if you

will, around their roads and bridges and facilities, their trails, the management of our forest, the infrastructure that is entailed in giving public access to these public spaces.

It couldn't be a more important investment, and it couldn't give America a bigger return. So I thank my colleagues, I look forward to getting this rapidly through the House of Representatives.

I thank the President and I yield the floor.