



Empowering all to enjoy, share, and preserve the hiking experience

November 29, 2022

Senator Steve Daines
Senator Martin Heinrich

Re: Support for the Continental Divide Trail Completion Act (S. 4995)

Dear Senator Daines and Senator Heinrich,

On behalf of American Hiking Society (AHS) and the 57 million strong hiking community we are thrilled to share our excitement and support for the opportunity to complete the Continental Divide Trail (CDT). The hiking community thanks you for your leadership on the Continental Divide Trail Completion Act and encourages all Senators to act today to protect the major watershed of the North American Continent and a crown jewel for millions of hikers, recreation users, and gateway community residents.

The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail was designated as a part of the National Trail System by Congress in 1978, to conserve and create better access to the natural, scenic, historical, and cultural resources along the Continental Divide. The trail spans 3,100 miles, traversing New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana, but more than just a trail, the CDT is a connector of communities, cultures, traditions and landscapes. Over the past four decades, since the trail's creation, federal agencies, nonprofit partners, volunteers, and other members of the trail community have diligently worked to complete the CDT. Currently, there are more than 160 miles of the CDT where those seeking a continuous footpath are diverted onto busy roadways and highways, making for a journey that is not only less safe and creates access issues, it is not aligned with the characteristics for which the trail was designated. This legislation will allow our partners at the Continental Divide Trail Coalition to work with the federal and state agencies to create a collective vision and future for the CDT - and ensuring that the people most affected by decisions around the CDT, are part of the decision making process, especially Traditional Communities, Tribal Nations, Native People and historically marginalized and underrepresented communities along the Rocky Mountain West.

The CDT Completion Act directs the Secretary of Agriculture and the Interior to prioritize completion of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail in time for the CDT's 50th anniversary in 2028, by eliminating gaps between sections of the Trail and relocating existing portions of the Trail where necessary to maximize conservation and enjoyment of the Trail corridor.

American Hiking Society supports this legislation because completing the CDT invests in the outdoor recreation economy that is the powerhouse for the local economy for many rural rocky mountain west communities. This includes the 20 designated Gateway Communities along the CDT, where trail visitors spend money in town, leading to growth in jobs, new businesses, and new opportunities to revitalize historic downtowns. This is critical because many of these communities are seeing their young people move away, housing prices drive out locals, and the permanent loss of jobs in some sectors, and need alternative ways to sustain and even grow their local economies in order to keep their communities

thriving. Completion benefits public health and creates new access to nature, by inspiring in-town trails being linked to the CDT, so community members have places to walk and bike which helps combat preventable diseases like heart disease and diabetes. Completion cultivates the next generation of land and water stewards by creating more opportunities for youth of all backgrounds to explore educational and professional opportunities in the outdoors. Finally, completion is not just about the trail - it's about the holistic benefits and creating a culture around all the CDT experience has to offer, and continues to keep connections to one of the most important landscapes of the North American Continent thriving for all people for future generations to come.

For additional information, please contact Tyler Ray, Senior Director for Programs and Advocacy, tray@americanhiking.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather Klein Olson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Heather Klein Olson, MBA, MS, CFRE
Acting Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tyler Ray". The signature is cursive and elegant, with the first name being the most prominent.

Tyler Ray
Senior Director for Programs and Advocacy