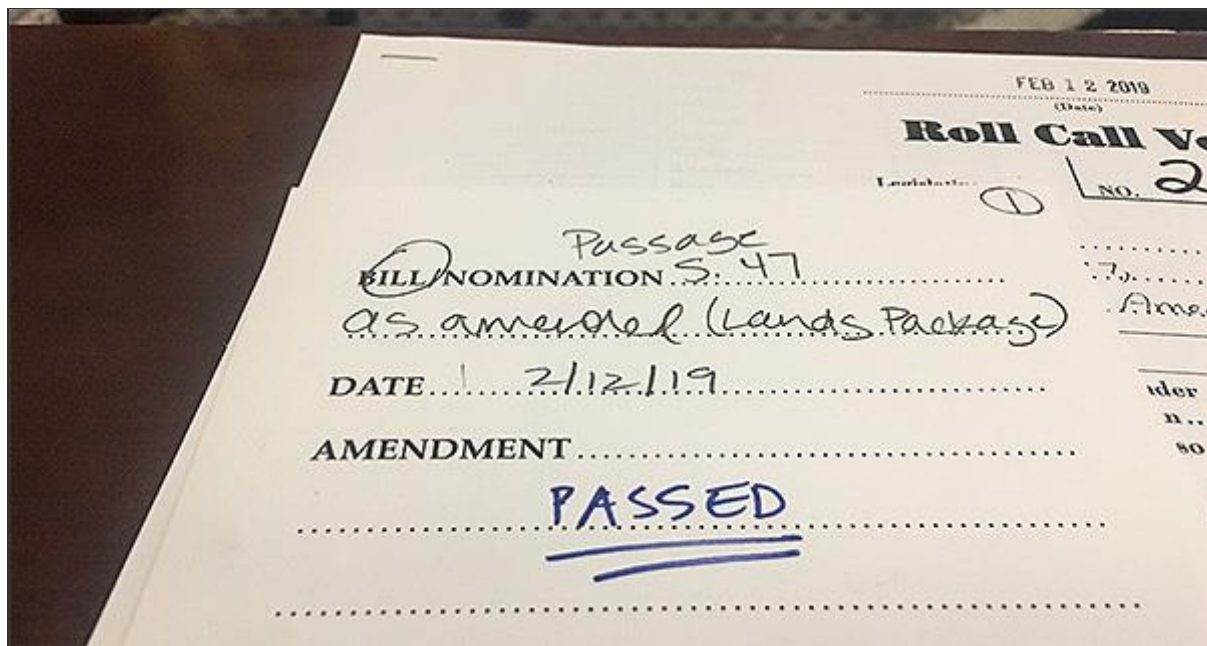


NATURAL RESOURCES

After lands package, lawmakers prepare for 'next big lift'

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The vote sheet for the Senate's public lands package, which passed yesterday. Kellie Lunney/E&E News

The Senate overwhelmingly passed a broad package last night with more than 110 land and water bills, including language to permanently renew the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

The 92-8 final vote approving [S. 47](#) was five years in the making — and marked a major legislative accomplishment for Energy and Natural Resources Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska).

"It's a good victory today for us here in the Senate," Murkowski said during a post-vote press conference with a handful of Republican and Democratic senators, including former ENR ranking member Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), who helped shepherd the package during the last Congress.

"The next step, of course, is to send it over to the House," Murkowski said. "We're looking forward to them taking it up quickly and hopefully without a great deal of fuss."

House Natural Resources Chairman Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.) told E&E News yesterday before the Senate vote that he hoped to move the lands package swiftly through the lower chamber, preferably on suspension, a more expedited legislative process in the House that requires two-thirds support in the chamber for passage.

Congress is scheduled to go on recess next week. If that happens, the earliest the House would take up the package would be the week of Feb. 25.

The Arizona Democrat also said it is important to "keep intact" the package the Senate sends over.

"Some people have some concerns about portions of it, but overall, if we keep it intact, there's a possibility we can pass it," Grijalva said. "I don't think we can add anything to it, because then it goes back to the Senate."

In a statement, Grijalva said the Senate passage was "one of the biggest bipartisan wins for this country I've ever seen in Congress." He called it "an old-school green deal to go alongside the 'Green New Deal' I just joined."

The eight senators who voted against the lands package were all Republicans: Sens. Jim Inhofe and James Lankford of Oklahoma, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, Mike Lee of Utah, Rand Paul of Kentucky, Ted Cruz of Texas, and Ben Sasse of Nebraska.

What's in it

The "Natural Resources Management Act" includes bills sponsored by half the Senate. It would designate more than 1.3 million acres of new wilderness, create four new national monuments, add more than 367 miles of rivers to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, and increase the size of national parks by more than 42,000 acres.



Energy and Natural Resources Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) with colleagues cheering yesterday's passage of public lands legislation. Energy and Natural Resources Committee/Facebook

It also includes a section to expand and enhance hunting, fishing and recreation on federal lands.

Conservation, hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation groups praised Senate passage of S. 47 and urged the House to move quickly on it.

"BHA members called on their members of Congress, they wrote letters and traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with their elected officials, they spoke out repeatedly in support of this legislation," said Land Tawney, president and CEO of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers.

"To our House leaders: American sportsmen and women urge you to remain focused on the task at hand," he added. "Expediently advance this foresighted measure."

Diane Regas, president and CEO of the Trust for Public Land, said she was "gratified" Congress was "finally" making LWCF a priority, "even as I'm mindful of the hurdles yet to come."

LWCF is the "crown jewel" of the package, but the many other provisions include:

- New wilderness designations in California, New Mexico and Utah.
- A ban on mining north of Yellowstone National Park via a withdrawal of mineral rights on 30,000 acres of federal public land.
- A provision allowing 2,800 Alaska Natives who served during the Vietnam era to apply for a congressionally promised Native allotment.
- Improvements to the national volcano monitoring and early warning system.
- Expansion of a national Civilian Conservation Corps to engage young people and veterans in conservation and outdoor recreation projects.

Many of the individual projects included in the package are "decades in the making," said New Mexico Sen. Martin Heinrich (D).

Republicans and Democrats at the press conference also pointed out the importance of outdoor recreation and public lands to the overall national economy.

The Outdoor Industry Association estimated that businesses facilitating access to public lands generated \$887 billion in consumer spending in 2017.

"It took public lands to bring divided government together," said Sen. Steve Daines (R-Mont.), a big LWCF booster and member of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Mandatory funding

Despite the bipartisan goodwill and praise, many outside groups, including the League of Conservation Voters, said the package was not "perfect."

Several conservation organizations, as well as many lawmakers, want mandatory funding for LWCF along with permanent reauthorization.

Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.), the ENR Committee's ranking member, said during last night's press conference that securing mandatory funding for LWCF is "our next big lift" and that supporters need "to make sure that gets done."

Murkowski acknowledged the "divide" in the Senate on mandatory funding for LWCF.

"I don't think that issue is done and over," she said in response to a question, adding, "I think that may be something you see coming out of the House" in the future.

The authorized funding level for LWCF is \$900 million, but it's hardly ever been funded at that level; its annual appropriations in recent years have typically been about half that.

The Senate bill originally included language that would have permanently reauthorized and fully funded LWCF ([*Greenwire*](#), Oct. 2, 2018). But the final package ultimately reflected the House version, which did not address mandatory funding.

It was and remains an issue.

Then-House Natural Resources Chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah), now the panel's ranking member, said in the fall that including mandatory funding for LWCF would have tanked the whole deal in the lower chamber ([*E&E News PM*](#), Sept. 27, 2018).