

Written by gallupsun
Tuesday, 28 February 2023 15:47

Representatives of a broad coalition of New Mexico organizations released the following statement after the House Energy, Environment & Natural Resources Committee voted 5-4 with a “do-pass” recommendation on Senate Bill 9: The Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund, that would create the state’s first dedicated and long-term funding stream for land and water conservation Feb. 28. SB9 passed the full Senate on Feb. 14 with a strong bipartisan vote of 33-7 vote. It now heads to the full House of Representatives for consideration.

“Investing in conservation is not just a financial commitment, it is a moral imperative,” Keegan King from the Native Land Institute, said. “The historic investments in the Enchantment Legacy Fund reflect our recognition of the inextricable link between the health of our planet and the well-being of all its inhabitants, present and future. This bill is a pledge to future generations of New Mexicans that we will be responsible stewards of the earth, preserving its natural wonders and protecting its delicate balance for years to come.”

“New Mexico is now closer than ever to having sustainable funding for conservation for the first time and into the future,” Dan Roper, New Mexico Policy Lead for the Angler Conservation Program at Trout Unlimited, said. “Thanks to the leadership of Chairman Small and bipartisan members of the House Appropriations & Finance Committee, an initial seed investment of \$100 million is currently included in the House budget. We call on legislators to deliver for their constituents by appropriating \$350 million to ensure there is enough funding to make a real impact in all 33 counties and tribal communities.”

Roper went into further detail about how the money would be spent.

“This includes more dollars for healthy river stewardship and watershed protection, which is just one of the many underfunded areas SB9 will address with more long-term investments,” he said.

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During the hearing, several students from across the state spoke about the importance of SB9, including Animas Public Schools, Valencia High School in Los Lunas, and the Santa Fe Girls School.

“We must conserve and protect our land and rivers so we can continue our traditions and future generations can understand the sacredness of our life-giving rivers,” one student representative said. “We cannot allow our waterways to become extinct rivers, our forests to become deserts, or our heritage to become footnotes of forgotten history. We must act now to ensure our environment is preserved and protected for future generations. Please support Senate bill 9 and help make New Mexico a better and safer place.”

Roper applauded the young people who showed their support.

“It was especially encouraging to hear from youth leaders who understand the need to preserve our agricultural economy, protect communities from climate change, grow our outdoor recreation economy and support our fish and wildlife species.” Roper said. “SB9 is an investment in our future, and we should do right by the next generation of New Mexicans by passing this bill. We appreciate the members of the committee who supported this bill and urge the House to take it up quickly so our communities can get the funding they need and deserve to protect our land, water, wildlife and culture.”

SB9, the Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund, would invest in existing state programs to leverage federal funds to protect New Mexico communities from wildfire, flood and drought, safeguard urban and rural water supplies, support rural and agricultural communities, and grow our outdoor recreation economy. The bill is sponsored by Sens. Steven Neville, Peter Wirth and Rep. Nathan Small, building on the vision laid out by Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham in her executive budget recommendation.

The Fund is a bipartisan product of five years’ negotiations among a broad coalition of legislators, state agencies, community stakeholders and non-governmental organizations.

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More information can be found at enchantmentfund.org.

