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By MATTHEW DALY

Washington (AP) -- Senate leaders and the Trump administration have reached an election-year deal to double spending on a popular conservation program and devote more than a \$1 billion a year to clear a growing maintenance backlog at national parks.

The deal, announced Wednesday by senators from both parties, would spend more than \$2 billion per year on conservation and outdoor recreation projects and park maintenance across the country.

If approved by Congress and signed by President Donald Trump, the bill "will be the most significant conservation enacted by Congress in nearly half a century," said Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn.

Alexander was one of 12 senators from both parties who hailed the bill at a news conference Wednesday. The breakthrough, which is supported by the leaders of both parties, came as Trump tweeted support for the proposal despite repeatedly trying to slash spending for the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund in recent years.

The program uses federal royalties from offshore oil and gas drilling to pay for conservation and public recreation projects around the country. The 55-year-old fund is authorized to collect \$900 million a year but generally receives less than half that amount from Congress.

The plan announced Wednesday would fully fund the conservation program and add \$1.3 billion a year for parks maintenance. The proposed \$900 million for land and water conservation is nearly double the \$485 million Congress approved for the program this year and 60 times larger than the amount Trump proposed in his budget plan just last month.

Trump credited Republican Sens. Cory Gardner of Colorado and Steve Daines of Montana for his change of heart. "ALL thanks to @SenCoryGardner and @SteveDaines, two GREAT Conservative Leaders!" Trump tweeted.

Both Daines and Gardner are seeking reelection this year, and Gardner is considered one of the Senate's most vulnerable incumbents.

"I'm not going to try to play politics or point partisan fingers," Gardner told reporters Wednesday. "I'm going to focus on the good the great outdoors does."

Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., said he didn't care about the plan's politics, only that it helped his state and others across the country.

"Politics be damned, let's get this done," Manchin said, standing next to Gardner at a Capitol news conference.

Daines also downplayed the bill's politics, saying, "This is a bipartisan moment."

Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., who is retiring this year, said politics should take a backseat, even in an election year. "This is about doing the right thing for America," he said. Former Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper, the Democratic front-runner to challenge Gardner, said in a tweet that Gardner supported cuts to the conservation fund as recently as 2018. Gardner also voted to confirm former oil and coal lobbyist David Bernhardt as interior secretary.

"Only President Trump would praise a record like this," Hickenlooper said.

Trump predicted Congress will approve the plan, which also includes increased funding for national parks. "When I sign it into law, it will be HISTORIC for our beautiful public lands," he said in a tweet.

Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., called Trump's tweet "good news," but added: "It's almost too good to be true."

At a budget hearing Wednesday, Bernhardt acknowledged that Trump's tweet took him by surprise, but said he and the rest of the Trump administration support full funding for the conservation program and for clearing the maintenance backlog, a priority of interior secretaries of both parties.

"The president made his comment and I'm pretty 100% confident everybody's getting in line," Bernhardt said.

Udall praised Trump's political instincts, saying Trump was "right to sense that this is a popular issue," noting a recent poll that found 70% of Westerners, including majorities of both parties, support full funding of the conservation fund.

"If the president is sincere in abandoning his administration's previous attempts to gut" the fund, Udall said he is eager to work across party lines "to get this done for the American people and for future generations."