

Senators Murkowski and Cantwell reintroduce lands bill package

January 31, 2019

On January 8, Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Maria Cantwell (D-WA) reintroduced a bipartisan package of more than one hundred public lands, natural resources, and water bills, which they negotiated last year with their leadership counterparts on the House Natural Resources Committee.

The lands package—S. 47, the Natural Resources Management Act—was placed directly on the Senate calendar for expedited consideration.

The lands package contains provisions sponsored by a total of fifty senators in the 115th Congress. It includes measures to improve the existing U.S. volcano monitoring network, reauthorize the U.S. Geological Survey's geologic mapping program, and permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). It also includes bills to provide flexibility to reroute the natural gas pipeline authorized in the Denali National Park and Preserve, and to increase the maximum acreage available for inclusion in the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument.

The 680-page package had previously failed to pass the Senate in late December 2018, after months of negotiations, because of objections from Senators Mike Lee (R-UT) and Rand Paul (R-KY) to past use of the LWCF to acquire more federal land. At the time, Senator Lee offered to waive his objections if Senator Murkowski would accept the addition of language to the Antiquities Act that would require congressional approval for new national monument designations in Utah. Such exemptions currently exist for Alaska and Wyoming. Still, the new lands package does not include the two-word amendment proposed by Senator Lee to exempt Utah from the Antiquities Act.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) filed a motion on January 31 to move forward on the public lands package, meaning the Senate will likely consider the bill in the next week.

Also on January 31, a bipartisan group of senators reintroduced a stand-alone bill to permanently reauthorize the LWCF (S. 302), which gives this particular measure another path to passage if the broader lands package encounters problems. On the House side, Natural Resources Committee Chairman Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ) recently told reporters that he also plans to file a separate bill related to reauthorizing LWCF.

Sources: E&E News; National Park Service; U.S. Senate, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.
