

Please don't cap our giving

The season of giving is a time to give thanks — and give back.

From Colorado Gives Day to Superstorm Sandy to all of our favorite local nonprofits, America is at its best when it comes together to help others. Unfortunately, incentives that encourage our can-do, giving spirit are threatened like never before, and at a time when they're needed most.

President Barack Obama and members of Congress are considering caps or cuts to the charitable deduction, a 100-year-old tax benefit for those who give donations to charitable causes.

While our nation faces a real and urgent budget crisis, this approach would have dire consequences, reducing donations to nonprofits by billions of dollars and cutting or eliminating work that is very important to our community.

It makes no sense, particularly when 85 percent of nonprofits experienced higher demand for their services in 2011, according to the Nonprofit Finance Fund. This year promises to be no different.

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Our future depends on a strong philanthropic sector for a faster, sustainable economic recovery. Congress and the administration must recognize the value of an independent, nonprofit infrastructure with longstanding experience to serve community needs in good times and bad.

Charitable giving enables local nonprofit organizations in Eagle County to greatly enhance the quality of life for all residents and guests while providing very necessary programs and services — programs that keep our water and trails clean, that provide emergency services for community members in need and offer enrichment programs to children, students and underserved populations.

From feeding hungry children, teaching adults to read and healing animals and humans alike; to protecting our landscapes, restoring our rivers, educating the next generation of scientists and providing cultural and artistic opportunities ... this is the mission of our local nonprofit community.

One would be hard pressed to find an aspect of our lives that would not be negatively affected by cutting or capping the charitable deduction for generous philanthropic contributions.

According to Giving USA, individual contributions to charitable causes in this country account for 73 percent of all charitable giving. The charitable deduction is different than other itemized deductions in that it rewards a selfless act by encouraging individuals to give part of their income to worthy causes. Data suggests that for every dollar subject to the charitable deduction, the public typically receives \$3 of benefit. No other tax provision does that.

Now is not the time to cut or cap the lifeblood of giving that supports the nonprofit, charitable organizations working for our community.

On behalf of all local nonprofits in Eagle County, I urge you to please contact our representatives and senators and tell them to leave the 100-year-old charitable deduction in place so we may continue America's great giving tradition.

Jason Denhart is the director of communications and development for the Eagle Valley Land Trust.