



Board of County Commissioners

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September 17, 2019

Hon. Scott Tipton, U.S. Representative
3rd Congressional District of Colorado
c/o Liz Payne, Legislative Director
218 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0603
Via email: liz.payne@mail.house.com

Dear Representative Tipton,

We are writing to offer our comments on the proposed Colorado Recreation Enhancement and Conservation (REC) Act. As a County with an economy based on sustainable outdoor recreation, and where public lands are a major component of our residents' quality of life, we appreciate your desire to increase protections for public lands in Western Colorado. We also appreciate your focus solely within your own congressional district. However, we are hopeful that you will work to expand the scope of this bill beyond your district to recognize that public lands exist and are managed irrespective of political boundaries. This bill has and is advancing through the House.

There are critical public lands deserving of protection in Eagle County that have had over a decade of community and stakeholder outreach, have our full support, yet have been omitted from the REC Act. These include the proposed Camp Hale National Historic Landscape, which would confer well-deserved recognition on the Army's 10th Mountain Division who fought valiantly in World War II and was pivotal to the founding of the modern ski industry and the outdoor recreation industry. They also include areas along the spine of the Continental Divide, including the Spraddle Creek and Freeman Creek additions to the Eagles Nest Wilderness, and the Megan Dickie addition to the Holy Cross Wilderness. Any public lands bill for western Colorado must include these lands which have already gone through more than a decade of review and enjoy broad-based community support. Additionally, there are well-vetted Wilderness Study Areas and one USFS Recommended Wilderness worthy of protection in Eagle County and in the third congressional district. These are the Castle Peak and Bull Gulch WSAs and Red Table Recommended Wilderness.

These additional Eagle County areas (included in the CORE Act working its way through Congress) were developed through more than a decade of intensive discussion with local residents, businesses, land managers, fire professionals, city and county staff, and elected officials. Working to combine CORE Act and REC Act provisions would support existing and future recreation, conserve wildlife habitat, protect agricultural and water supply needs, and allow our forests to be managed for community wildfire safety both before and during a possible wildfire. The history of engagement and support from local stakeholders affirms the value of these provisions.

Millions of people visit Western Colorado each year, and our federal public lands contribute immeasurably to our economy and quality of life. But we must have the vision to protect what is wilderness, preserve the character of our communities, create ongoing opportunities for sustainable recreation, and conserve wildlife habitat.



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Also, Eagle County greatly values the role of HAATS in our national security and in our own community. HAATS is beneficial to our local economy and is an essential partner to our search and rescue operations. As you are aware, the Department of Defense has updated its policies to ensure that HAATS flights in the areas proposed for protection in the CORE Act would continue unaffected by these designations, and the National Guard has confirmed in writing to the House Armed Services Committee that it has “no concerns with” the CORE Act since the “affected area is outside of the High Altitude Army National Guard Aviation Training Site training area.” Further, the preference of the Department of Defense is a non-legislative overflight policy to ensure that decision-making remains in the hands of the DOD and military experts. These positions are unlikely to change in the context of the REC Act, and any false impression of an unresolved conflict between the CORE Act and the ability of HAATS to safely and successfully carry out its mission could unnecessarily strain the positive, effective, and productive partnership between HAATS, Eagle County, and our local recreation community.

Any public lands bill for Western Colorado should contain lands in Eagle County already identified through many years of extensive work that has built broad consensus and support for protecting these landscapes. The Continental Divide, Camp Hale, and other previously identified lands in the 2nd congressional district have a long history which has resulted in many changes, concessions, and compromises producing a well vetted and community supported product. We ask that you find a way to include in the REC Act the Eagle County public land designations already identified.

Sincerely,

Board of County Commissioners

Jeanne McQueeney
Chair

Kathy Chandler-Henry
Commissioner

Matt Scherr
Commissioner