



COLORADO

Department of Natural Resources

Executive Director's Office
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Denver, CO 80203

1. You were a Summit County Commissioner and long-time resident, and now you are DNR head who knows the community and landscape well. Were there specific topics raised in the hearing that you could add detail or context to given your local expertise?

I appreciated the opportunity to testify and to emphasize the many years of careful work, collaboration, open dialogue, and compromise that is reflected in this bill. Despite the long history, consultation, and robust public participation behind the provisions of the CORE Act, some confusion and misinformation is apparent in the hearing record. Many aspects of the Forest Service's testimony do not reflect the management reality on the ground, including the successful shared stewardship of local communities and land managers that has characterized our relationships here in Colorado. In addition, in a variety of respects, the agency's oral testimony presented at the hearing contradicted its own written testimony submitted for the hearing, as well as past testimony the agency has submitted to Congress and information it has provided to elected officials in Colorado. I—and I know many others in Colorado—look forward to working with the Forest Service and the Committee to clarify those issues.

It is also worth reiterating the level of support that the provisions of the CORE Act enjoy, not only from local communities, but also from individuals, businesses, and organizations across the state and nation. While that support is overwhelming—including seven counties, many municipalities, hundreds of businesses, thousands of individuals, and a great many organizations—I am afraid there are a few organizations that oppose the bill (some of which categorically oppose any new wilderness in Colorado), which seems unavoidable with public lands conservation bills in this era.

I can assure you that the Governor and I have fully considered the views expressed by those organizations and the information they have provided, as I know the members of the delegation, county commissioners, other local officials, and many others who have led the efforts to develop the provisions of the CORE Act and who strongly support the collaborative compromises that it reflects have as well. While only Congress can designate new Wilderness, the Department of Natural Resources and other state agencies will continue its work to support sustainable motorized recreation, forest management, ranching, and other activities on state and federal public lands in Colorado through our numerous programs that will continue to provide financial, technical, and other support for those activities.



2. There were several letters submitted for the record from constituencies concerned about the bill's impacts to off-highway vehicles, including snowmobiles. Can you speak to the vast vetting process, multiple revisions and over decade worth of work to address these concerns in the bill that you saw undertaken at the local level, given your role as a county commissioner?

The CORE Act was crafted in such a way as to find consensus among the various stakeholders in the management of the public lands addressed by the bill. That process has taken many years, with countless refinements resulting from many meetings, research efforts, and multiple congressional hearings. In each case, the compromises and refinements were made with the goal of crafting a balanced bill that advances the public interest.

Specifically, along with the many other values at stake, that process considered the many opportunities for off-highway vehicle recreation across the landscapes addressed by the bill. It also considered substantial investments Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Federal land management agencies have made in recent years to develop sustainable opportunities for off-highway vehicle recreation on public lands. For example, the Vail Pass Winter Recreation Area (located between the proposed Tenmile Recreation Management Area and the Camp Hale National Historic Landscape) offers over 100 miles of groomed trails and free-ride open meadows for world-class snowmobiling within 55,000 acres of National Forest land in the winter, as well as numerous roads and trails for OHVs in the summer. Ultimately, that process of vetting and collaboration produced a bill that maintains and enhances protections for wildlife, watersheds, non-motorized recreation, and other values in key areas, while not closing any roads or trails that are currently open to motorized recreational use.

To be sure, this bill aims to protect the overriding public and community values on key public lands, and in some cases that requires limiting some uses that conflict with those values. For example, an area near the Town of Ophir would be closed to future winter motorized recreation under the bill because the potential for such use threatens the safety and enjoyment of the non-motorized recreation uses that are so popular and important to the local economy there. Although the Forest Service long-ago recognized those and other conflicts posed by snowmobiles there, it has failed to follow-through with making any management decision. The adjacent Town of Ophir and the county commission strongly advocated for finalizing the closure of the area through this legislation.

As a county commissioner, I was deeply involved in this process along with countless other elected officials, organizations, business owners, residents, and other individuals. That is why the proposal enjoys such strong and broad support across Colorado: the decisions it reflects are the right ones for the lands, their most important values, the communities that use them, and the public, and they were made the right way.

