



Kate Miller
Director of Government Affairs

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The Honorable Deb Haaland, Chair
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

The Honorable Don Young, Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

RE: House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Markup on HR.823 Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act 04/02/2019.

Dear Chair Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and members of the Committee,

Trout Unlimited supports H.R.823, the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act, and its individual components: The Continental Divide Recreation, Wilderness, and Camp Hale Legacy Act, the San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act, the Thompson Divide Withdrawal and Protection Act, and the Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA) Boundary Establishment Act. This bill would increase protections for a variety of public lands in Colorado that are very important to TU's 300,000 members and supporters across the country, including several thousand members who call Colorado home.

Trout Unlimited's mission is to conserve, protect and restore North America's trout and salmon fisheries and the watersheds upon which they depend. In Colorado, hunters, anglers and wildlife viewers had a \$5.1 billion economic impact in 2017. Public lands, and specifically protected areas, serve as the bedrock of that economy. Hunting and fishing rely on healthy watersheds, but so do downstream communities. Colorado's position as a headwaters state and an outdoor recreation hub cements the need for the CORE Act. It would simultaneously provide watershed protections and intelligent public land management decisions for current and future generations of Coloradans, along with millions of others downstream.

More than a dozen counties and municipalities from the affected landscapes have drafted resolutions and written letters in support of the CORE Act, and papers across the state have editorialized in favor of the bill. The 24 Trout Unlimited chapters across Colorado share that enthusiastic local support. Communities have come together, in some instances for decades, to identify places that deserve protection. As the population in Colorado is set to double by 2050, these communities are rallying to keep their special places special so that they might continue to be enjoyed now and in the future.

Continental Divide Recreation, Wilderness, and Camp Hale Legacy Act

Following several years of collaboration and compromise among local communities, land planners, legislators and relevant stakeholders, the resulting bill secures permanent protection for 58,492 acres of vital wildlife habitat, critical watersheds and valuable recreation areas along the Continental Divide. It creates three new Wilderness areas in the Tenmile Range, Hoosier Ridge and Williams Fork Mountains, and expands existing Wilderness designations at Eagles Nest, Ptarmigan Peak and Holy Cross while establishing a new Recreation Management Area that maintains important recreation resources and access for mountain bikers, hikers and other users.

The bill safeguards fishing and hunting opportunities by protecting ecologically important habitat to native cutthroat trout, black bear, elk, mule deer, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, moose and lynx. Protected areas serve as headwaters to the Eagle, Arkansas, Blue and Colorado rivers, which are among the state's most heavily utilized for recreational, municipal and agricultural use.

Additionally, the bill would designate the first-ever National Historic Landscape at Camp Hale, where the storied 10th Mountain Division trained during World War II and planted the seeds for Colorado's modern outdoor recreation economy built around skiing, hunting, fishing and all the other activities that emerged from their legacy. TU recognizes the contributions of these brave soldiers to our existing quality of life and believes that heritage should be acknowledged along with the surrounding terrain that inspired them.

San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act

This bill, the result of more than 15-years of local community collaboration, includes important protections for the headwaters of the San Miguel, the Uncompahgre and the Animas watersheds. It also includes protections for some of the state's most iconic peaks including Mount Sneffels and Wilson Peak.

As a leading advocate for the conservation of fish and wildlife habitats, we enthusiastically support the 61,000 acres of protections that are included in the bill. These lands are critically important for many resources including fish, wildlife, recreation, and watersheds.

The footprint of areas directly protected by the bill includes 2.5 miles of Colorado River cutthroat trout habitat, and 17 total river miles; protections that would have positive impacts far downstream. Fish and wildlife in the area would benefit from the proposed designation, and migration corridors for elk, deer, and rocky mountain bighorn sheep would be prioritized and protected. Some of the best hunting and fishing in the state would be protected for future generations because of this bill.

Thompson Divide Withdrawal and Protection Act

TU has been a leading voice among sportsmen fighting for protection of the Thompson Divide for more than a decade. The roughly 200,000-acre backcountry expanse in the White River and Gunnison National Forests south of Carbondale is recognized by Colorado Parks and Wildlife as high value habitat for deer, elk, moose, bears and lynx, includes conservation populations of Colorado River cutthroat trout, and provides clean water to more than 15 watersheds in the region, including tributaries of the Crystal,

Gunnison and Colorado rivers, and the Gold Medal trout waters on the Roaring Fork River. Overlapping some of the richest game-management units in the state, the area generates more than 20,000 big game licenses every year and accounts for significant annual contributions to Colorado's outdoor recreation economy.

The current bill improves upon previous iterations by incorporating a methane capture provision and lease exchange credits for the few remaining holders of undeveloped leases within a withdrawal boundary that has been redrawn to accommodate the requests of potentially impacted stakeholders. Bolstered by the support of a broad-based community coalition, federal legislation is the final remaining step to achieving long-term protections from inappropriate energy development in the region and has TU's full endorsement.

Curecanti National Recreation Area (NRA) Boundary Establishment Act

The bill would place management of the 50,667-acre Curecanti National Recreation Area established in 1965 around Gunnison County's Blue Mesa Reservoir under the sole direction of the National Park Service. Boundary adjustments would allow for more efficient management of a large swath of public land and ease the burden on multiple agencies. The legislation would also enforce an existing obligation to acquire approximately 16 additional miles of public fishing opportunities within the Upper Gunnison Basin upstream of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

The bill ensures that the Bureau of Reclamation upholds its commitment to expand high-quality public fishing access in the basin, which was lost to inundation when Blue Mesa and Curecanti NRA were created. This additional river access would be a major success story for the communities of Gunnison County and the rest of the angling, boating, birding, and recreating public. The residents of Colorado are due these river miles, but also know the importance of responsible public land management. Being good stewards to our public lands means seeking out simple and effective solutions, and this bill fits that mold.

Conclusion

Thank you for considering our views on this legislation. We look forward to working with the bill sponsors, members of Colorado delegation, and members of this committee to advance a bipartisan proposal during the 116th Congress.

For questions related to these comments, please contact the following:

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