

STATEMENT OF STEVE BONOWSKI, LAKEWOOD COLORADO, FOR:

CONSERVATIVES FOR RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP, P.O. Box 613, Oakton VA 22124

COLORADO MOUNTAIN CLUB & CMC FOUNDATION, 710 10th. St. #200, Golden CO 80401

**Speaking in favor of: HR 2546, the Colorado Wilderness Act of 2019, July 10, 2019.
(Oral)**

Thank you Ms. Chairperson, members of the Subcommittee, and Rep. DeGette for offering the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Steve Bonowski, from Lakewood, Colorado and I am speaking for two organizations; Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship; also the Colorado Mountain Club and its Foundation.

The C.R.S. is a national, grassroots organization, focusing on primarily on issues of protection of public lands, renewable energy, and climate change. The C.R.S. is an educational offshoot of the former Republicans for Environmental Protection that was founded in 1995. Our focus is providing educational information to congressional staffs, primarily Republican staff, and to citizens groups in the several states where we work. I am a Colorado based member of the CRS board of directors.

The Colorado Mountain Club was founded in 1912 and is the oldest and largest outdoor education, recreation, and conservation organization in Colorado. The Club provides training in skills ranging from day hiking in foothills close to Denver to learning to climb big peaks around the work. From a Conservation perspective, one of the reasons for the Club's founding was to work for protection of what is now Rocky Mountain National Park, that was established in 1915. I am a past member of the Club's board of directors and current member of the CMC Foundation board of directors.

On behalf of the two organizations, we have discussed a number of bullet points within our written testimony that is submitted for the record. Now, I would like to hit upon a couple of those points which will help explain why political conservatives are supporting HR 2546.

In the 20 years since Congresswoman DeGette first introduced an version of this bill, a lot has happened both in Colorado as well as the nation. From an economic perspective, the country has seen the upheavals caused by Y2K, the Dot-Com bust, 9-11, the Great Recession of 2007-09, and the big energy bust of 2014.

In the past two decades, Colorado has come under assault, and not necessarily a "bad assault." Colorado has experienced unprecedented population growth in the past 20 years, with more projected to come. The past 20 years has seen the onset of major pressures on the state's open space, its public lands, its water, and its transportation infrastructure, among other impacts. Thanks in part to all the ski areas, Colorado's White River National Forest is the most heavily visited national forest in the country. The Pike/San Isabel National Forest consistently ranks in the top five in terms of visitation. Rocky Mountain National Park is consistently in the top three in visits of all national parks in the country.

What does the increased population mean for Colorado's backcountry. An upside can be growth in visits and in outdoor recreation for rural economies that take the right approach

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to this growth and its management. A major downside is more sprawl that eats into the large areas of wildlife habitat that are needed for traditional uses of the land such as hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing and photography.

An old quote from many years ago referred to the notion that land is valuable because “no one is making any more of it.” In short, Colorado needs to take action now in order to preserve the wide open spaces that are such a draw to people wanting to move to Colorado, establish businesses here, and recreate here.

HR 2546 is designed to take advantage of this need by protecting over 740,000 acres of lands with wilderness characteristics. It is interesting to note that much of this land is lower or middle in elevation and composed of areas that continue to see recreational activities and visits when the high peaks are closed off to many recreationists who don't ski.

Traditional industries such as mining, oil & gas, logging, and even livestock grazing can be subject to market fluctuations on a global scale. What are rural counties then to do? Headwaters Economics from Bozeman, Montana has done studies showing the rural counties in the West that have protected lands such as wilderness have healthier and more vibrant economies, with more jobs, than do counties without those amenities. It is interesting to note that during the Great Recession, outdoor recreation was the only industry nationally that continued to experience growth, albeit modest in nature.

Conservation is Conservative™. The time is now to take action and pass HR 2546. It's the common sense conservative thing to do. Thank you.

**Statement by Steve Bonowski, Lakewood, Colorado, on behalf of Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship; also the Colorado Mountain Club and its Foundation, for HR 2546, the Colorado Wilderness Act of 2019, July 10, 2019.
(written)**

Thank you, Ms. Chairperson, members of the subcommittee, and Rep. DeGette for offering the opportunity to speak today on behalf of HR 2546, the Colorado Wilderness Act of 2019. My name is Steve Bonowski and I am from Lakewood, Colorado.

I am speaking today on behalf of two organizations; Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship, P.O. Box 613, Oakton VA, 22124. The C.R.S. is a national grassroots non-profit working on issues of mostly protection of public lands, renewable energy, and climate change. The CRS is an education offshoot from the former Republicans for Environmental Protection, founded in 1995. The bulk of our work is education outreach to primarily Republican members of Congress and their staffs, and to mostly Republican citizen groups in the states where we actively work. I am a Colorado based member of the CRS board of directors.

I am also here today on behalf of the Colorado Mountain Club and its foundation, 710 10th. St. #200, Golden CO 80401. The Club was founded in 1912 and is the oldest and largest outdoor education, recreation, and conservation organization in Colorado. The Club provides training in skills ranging from hiking in nearby foothills from Denver, to learning to climb big peaks

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(written)**

around the world. From a Conservation perspective, one of the reasons for creation of the Club was to work towards protection of what is now Rocky Mountain National Park, which occurred in 1915. I am a past member of the Club's board of directors and a current member of the CMC Foundation's board of directors.

We would like to touch on a number of points as to why it is important for conservatives and other citizens to support this bill.

1) Rep. DeGette first introduced this bill in 1999. At that time, there was a lot of talk like "we don't want a Denver Democrat coming into our county and telling us what to do with our land." Interesting to note that back then, as well as now, these are public lands that belong not just to people who live there; "the community of place;" but also belong to all citizens; "the community of interest."

2) Since 1999, there have been a number of national, and even global, economic upheavals that have served to more focus peoples' minds. These would include the Y2K hysteria; Dot-Com, 9-11; the Great Recession of 2007-09; and the energy bust of 2014.

For a long time, during these sour economic times, the fast growth in Colorado, and indeed the entire Western US, went unnoticed. Today, Colorado is facing near unprecedented growth, with resulting pressures on open spaces, water, roads and other infrastructure. People come to Colorado to live, to set up businesses, and to recreate. According to the annual State of the West poll done by Colorado College, people highly value such things as open spaces, unfettered views, wilderness, and protection of wildlife habitat.

3) the effect of this population growth is being felt in almost every region of the state, particularly in the mountains and in the western plateau areas of Colorado. Rural counties are at a crossroads as to how to deal with the influx both of new residents and also increased numbers of visitors.

Headwaters Economics, based in Bozeman, Montana, has done high quality economic studies about the rural West, and the value of protected lands, including designated wilderness, to these rural counties. In general, rural counties that contain protected lands, such as wilderness, are better off economically, with more jobs and a more vibrant economy than those counties without such lands amenities. People move to these counties for the amenities. As an example, a major outdoor gear manufacturer, Osprey Packs, is headquartered in Cortez, Colorado, and Montezuma County, due to the protected lands. Including a national park, all or part of three national monuments, and hopefully soon several new wilderness areas courtesy of HR 2546.

Another county of note in the Colorado mountains is Hinsdale County, a thinly populated county within the San Juan Mountains south of Gunnison, Colorado. Two wilderness study areas west of town, that contain 14,000 peaks, are in HR 2546. These are the Handies Peak and Redcloud Peak WSAs. Additional wilderness already designated west of town include two more 14,000 peaks. These peaks act as magnets to bring visitors to town in season.

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4) there is a strong need to protect the lands contained within HR 2546 for a variety of reasons. These include, but are not limited to, protection of the critical wildlife habitat that supports traditional uses of the land such as hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing and photography. Designated wilderness areas also serve as repositories of clean air and clean water, especially water that can be used as drinking water in rural communities. Designated wilderness is done by Congress and is the ultimate level of protection. Some of these areas have been in wilderness study area status, and being managed as wilderness, for almost 40 years. Other forms of protection, such as special recreation management areas, can be undone unless sanctioned by Congress.

5) the West, including Colorado, has seen a major increase in all forms of outdoor recreation and there is no end in sight for this new economy. Wilderness offers true multiple use: hiking, backpacking, cross county skiing (in season and where the land is high enough), horseback riding, photography of all kinds, hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, traditional rock climbing and bouldering, etc. Wilderness is open to citizens with mobility problems, who need to use crutches and wheelchairs. Grazing of domestic livestock is allowed in wilderness.

There is ample land outside of the areas contained in wilderness, or areas proposed for wilderness in HR 2546, for activities such as mountain biking and motorized recreation. There also are thousands of acres outside of the areas contained within HR 2546, as well as outside other designated wilderness areas and WSAs, for mining & energy development.

Rural counties in Colorado need to become more supportive of the protected lands that will increasingly drive their economies. What will make a rural county an attractive destination? What will make people want to visit?

6) some say there are “drawbacks” to designating the lands within HR 2546 as wilderness, or indeed to having any other protected lands. One of the oft-expressed concerns is the risk of wildfire. Nothing in the Wilderness Act precludes taking action to protect person and property. Indeed, citizens living in the wild land urban interface (WUI) should already be taking step to protect their homes through clearance of brush and trees around the home, and using fire resistant building materials. There is no real need “to actively manage” a forest as studies have shown that insect killed trees are no more prone to burning than are healthy trees. There are also ways to take action for cleaning up abandoned mine sites within wilderness that do not require motor vehicles and power tools.

7) leading Club trips over the years, it has been my privilege to take fellow Club members into some of these areas. In 2018, I took a Club group, along with a member of the congresswoman’s staff, to Demaree Canyon; and took a group to Handies Peak. I’ve visited Redcloud Peak and been in several other areas. I have never failed to marvel at the presence of these lands in our state, whether they be high elevation pine forest, or lower elevation desert with pinyon, juniper, and sagebrush.

8) Conclusion: giving maximum protection to these places is nothing more than common sense conservatism at work. TO CONSERVE IS CONSERVATIVE.

