

Testimony of Representative Scott Tipton (CO-03)
before the House Committee on Natural Resources
on Yucca House National Monument Boundary Revision Act
(H.R. 1492)

July 18, 2019

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop, and distinguished Committee Members, thank you for allowing me to offer testimony before your Committee today.

I am appearing before the Committee to advocate for H.R. 1492, the Yucca House National Monument Boundary Revision Act. The Yucca House National Monument is in Montezuma County, Colorado, and not too far away from my hometown of Cortez. It is one of the largest archaeological sites in Southwest Colorado, preserving a Montezuma Valley Ancestral Pueblo site that is unexcavated. If you were to look at it quickly, it might just look like several mounds of rocks, but it contains invaluable information and answers to questions we have about the large and active farming community that existed in the area centuries ago. This year, Yucca House National Monument is celebrating its 100th birthday.

The Monument was established by President Woodrow Wilson in 1919 following an initial donation of 9.6 acres by Henry Van Kleeck. In 1996 the Monument was further expanded by approximately 24 acres. Today, Yucca House National Monument is surrounded by private land, and access is granted through an easement on private property. The owner of that property has experienced trouble with traffic and parking and the arrangement is interfering with his ability to properly manage his farm.

A private landowner adjacent to the National Monument is now seeking to donate 160 acres to the Monument to further protect

archaeological sites and cultural resources and alleviate the access issues. The land has been studied and determined to be appropriate for inclusion in the national monument. The donation would facilitate a new access road to the Monument, as well as parking for visitors.

It is important to note that the Montezuma County Commission has approved the road and parking plan and waived its “no net loss” of private land policy to officially support the 160-acre donation. In doing this, the County has asked that my office work to release 5 Wilderness Study Areas within Montezuma and Dolores Counties that pose problems for the counties when it comes to protecting nearby communities from wildfire threats, balancing recreation needs, and managing noxious weeds. Those WSA releases will be included in an upcoming bill, and I am committed to seeing that process through.

I would like to submit a letter from Montezuma County into the record that indicates the County’s support for the Yucca House National Monument Boundary Revision, as well the request for the WSA releases.

Currently, the National Park Service has minor boundary revision authority, as long as the sum of the total acreage added to the unit is less than 200 acres and the lands are adjacent to other Federal Lands administered by the National Park Service. Although this proposed donation is less than 200 acres, the donation would increase the acreage within the monument about six times over. Therefore, Congress must authorize a boundary revision before the donation can be accepted.

I would also like to note that the National Park Service has given my office technical assistance on this bill, and I would request that the committee work with me during the mark-up process to ensure the text incorporates technical requests from the Park Service that will help facilitate the boundary revision and land donation.

The Yucca House National Monument is one of the most significant archaeological sites in the country and stands as a reminder of how the ancient Pueblo used to live hundreds of years ago. One-hundred years after it was first granted national protection, I think it is the perfect time for this committee to consider legislation to further expand the monument.

I thank the committee for holding this hearing and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.