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Testimony in Support H.R. 2621

Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

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I am here today to speak in support of H.R. 2621, the Chimney Rock National Monument Establishment Act, which would designate Chimney Rock in southwestern Colorado as a national monument. I am a resident of the region, a representative of the professional archaeological community, and a trustee of the Crow Canyon Archaeological Center in Cortez, Colorado. Crow Canyon is a private, not-for-profit organization that employs 50 people and conducts archaeological research and public education programs in the American Southwest in collaboration with American Indians.

Chimney Rock is a visually striking landform in the southern Colorado Rockies that rises 1,000 feet above the surrounding floodplain to an elevation of 7,600 feet. Chimney Rock is nationally important because of a unique archaeological site complex that exhibits the architectural design and exquisite stone masonry styles that are characteristic of the Chaco culture, an ancient society whose members were ancestors of modern Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and Arizona. Chaco culture flourished for three centuries, between A.D. 850 and 1150, with its political and religious center located in north central New Mexico, a place preserved today as Chaco Canyon National Historical Park. The significance of these spectacular ruins at Chaco Canyon was recognized in 1987 when the park was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Chimney Rock is located approximately 90 miles northeast of Chaco Canyon, and it served as an outpost in the Chaco regional settlement system. The national importance of Chimney Rock as a cultural site was recognized in 1970 when it was listed on the National Register of Historical Places.

The archaeological sites at Chimney Rock are dominated by a Chaco-style "great house" built in the late eleventh century to command a huge view of the surrounding landscape, and specifically to allow observations of rare astronomical phenomena. The great house at Chimney Rock is at the highest elevation of any Chacoan great house, and it is positioned precisely to serve as a lunar observatory. Every 18.6 years, the moon, as seen from the Chacoan great house, rises between two stone spires, or chimneys, during an event known as the Northern Lunar Standstill. Two major episodes of construction at the site have been tree-ring dated to AD 1076 and 1094, both of which are years in which the Northern Lunar Standstill would have occurred. The Monument would also include a large number of smaller sites that are the residences of the local community that lived at Chimney Rock before and during the use of the great house. Present-day American Indian groups in the Southwest consider Chimney Rock to be an important part of their history and cultural heritage and especially many Pueblo Indian groups who trace their descent from the people who lived in the Four Corners area centuries ago.

The importance of the Chimney Rock archaeological complex was recognized as early as the 1920s by the Colorado Historical Society, which carried out the first excavations there from 1920 to 1928. The

University of Colorado collaborated with the Forest Service in the early 1970s to develop the site for visitor access. University of Colorado researchers have worked at Chimney Rock several times since then, including as recently as 2009.

Chimney Rock is already under Forest Service management, and under the H.R. 2621 this would not change. No additional appropriations would be required because of a well-established and successful public-private partnership between the Forest Service and a local not-for-profit organization, the Chimney Rock Interpretive Association (CRIA). The Chimney Rock great house site has been open for public visitation since the 1970s, and since 1988 the Chimney Rock Interpretive Association has provided site tours and interpretive information at the site. Currently about 100 CRIA volunteers and 5 staff members lead two-hour walking tours for about 11,000 visitors a year and give interpretive information to another 4,000 people at a small visitors' center. The Chimney Rock Interpretive Association charges a fee for the tours, and those fees go into maintaining the site. Monument designation would not require any additional federal funding because visitor facilities are already in place, and the Chimney Rock Interpretive Association would continue to give tours and prepare educational materials for visitors in collaboration with the Forest Service.

Chimney Rock is a hidden jewel tucked away in the San Juan National Forest National Forest. Providing national monument status is imperative at this time for two reasons. First, monument designation would give Chimney Rock the recognition it clearly deserves and ensure its protection in perpetuity. Second, establishing Chimney Rock as a monument would enhance economic development in southwestern Colorado. Monument designation has strong local support from the Archuleta County Commission, the Town of Pagosa Springs, the Pagosa Springs Chamber of Commerce, the Chimney Rock Interpretive Association, and countless other regional businesses and organizations such as Crow Canyon that would benefit from the increased tourism afforded by national monument status.

Chimney Rock is related to other major archaeological attractions in southwestern Colorado and northwestern New Mexico, including Chaco Canyon National Historical Park, Aztec Ruins National Monument, and Mesa Verde National Park. These sites attract visitors from all over the nation and the world. With the added visibility that national monument status would bring, Chimney Rock would increase heritage tourism in Archuleta County and in the Four Corners region. That will translate into additional jobs in the private sector businesses in the region.

H.R. 2621 lists archaeological research as one of the activities permitted in the new Monument, and it is important that this provision stay in the bill so that research and interpretation of the archaeological resources would continue for the benefit of the public. The bill does not request or require any additional federal funding for research, but states that well-designed research will be permitted. Archaeological research has been and will continue to be one of the sources of new information about the Monument that supports interpretive and educational programs.