

STATEMENT OF BILL PINKHAM, MAYOR PRO TEM, TOWN OF ESTES PARK, COLORADO BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS, CONCERNING H.R. 2334, TO DESIGNATE AS WILDERNESS CERTAIN LAND WITHIN THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK AND TO ADJUST THE BOUNDARIES OF THE INDIAN PEAKS WILDERNESS AND THE ARAPAHO NATIONAL RECREATION AREA OF THE ARAPAHO NATIONAL FOREST IN THE STATE OF COLORADO.

NOVEMBER 13, 2007

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Town of Estes Park on H.R. 2334, a bill to designate as wilderness certain lands within Rocky Mountain National Park and adjust the boundaries of the Indian Peaks Wilderness and Arapaho National Recreation Area of the Arapaho National Forest in the State of Colorado.

Forty-three years have passed since Congress designated Rocky Mountain National Park as a wilderness study area, and 33 years have passed since President Nixon recommended wilderness designation. On May 14, 2007, local citizens and officials applauded the announcement by Representatives Musgrave and Udall and Senators Allard and Salazar at the Moraine Park Campground Amphitheater in Rocky Mountain National Park of the introduction of bipartisan legislation to permanently protect the backcountry of the Park as wilderness. H.R. 2334 was then introduced into the House of Representatives by Congressman Mark Udall with Congresswoman Marilyn Musgrave as cosponsor.

The Town of Estes Park, one of the two gateway communities to Rocky Mountain National Park fully supports H.R. 2334 designating approximately 250,000 acres of Rocky Mountain National Park's backcountry in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The Town will not take a position on the Grand River Ditch liability issue; however, it appears this is a major obstacle in granting wilderness designation to Rocky Mountain National Park, and we hope prompt resolution can be reached.

In addition to Estes Park, the gateway community of Grand Lake and the three Colorado counties that encompass the park (Larimer, Grand and Boulder) have endorsed the wilderness designation for Rocky Mountain National Park. It is also supported by a variety of conservation and civic groups, including the League of Women Voters, Colorado Environmental Coalition, Colorado Mountain Club, The Wilderness Society, Headwaters Trails Alliance, and the International Mountain Bicycling Association.

Wilderness designation will help sustain the ecological health of the park, guarantee the economic vitality of local communities, and ensure that the park remains as it is today for future generations of visitors to enjoy and explore.

The Board of Trustees of the Town of Estes Park has thoroughly reviewed the present proposed wilderness boundaries and received public input with regard to the designation of wilderness and all agreed to fully support it as evidenced in the attached Estes Park Resolution # 17-05, "Support of Wilderness Designation for Rocky Mountain National Park". We hope that the wilderness designation legislation will be adopted and will permanently protect and solidify the wild character of the park lands in perpetuity. Designation will have no impact on park management and function and would in no way alter current activities or access in the park. Park managers will continue to encourage hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, fishing, climbing, skiing, snowshoeing and sight-seeing with ample access to one of the nation's most beautiful landscapes.

Trail Ridge Road, the highest continuous paved road in the continental United States, and Fall River Road, the first road to cross the Rocky Mountains in northern Colorado, will continue to be maintained for motorized travel. This will allow visitors of all ages and abilities to experience the history and majesty of the magnificent park lands.

Wilderness designation will reaffirm the park's original mission to preserve vistas and wildlife, protecting the unscarred landscape from a crisscrossing of roads and from policies that could degrade the character of the park's forest and its quiet places. In this age of opportunistic development, it is important to protect this national treasure. Byproducts of preservation also promote clean air, water and open spaces to the benefit of the public health in Colorado.

We urge you to resolve any remaining issues and to act on the Wilderness Designation for Rocky Mountain National Park. Now is the time to make a difference and forever preserve our treasure for all generations.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to provide any further support or documentation that would assist the passage of H.R, 2334.