

Mr. Dick Scar
Owner
Pinyon Plaza Property Management

Testimony
Before the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on H.R. 4235, the Browns Canyon Wilderness Act

July 27, 2006

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony concerning the Browns Canyon Wilderness bill, H.R.4235, an important act of Congress for my county, state and nation. I have lived in Buena Vista, Colorado, for 34 years. My family owned and operated an outdoor specialty retail shop and outfitting business for 30 years, until it was sold in 2004. I have previously served as an elected trustee for the Town of Buena Vista and currently serve on the Chaffee County Planning Commission. I have also been a volunteer member of the local search and rescue team for over 30 years.

I am particularly proud that this bill was introduced by my own Representative, Congressman Joel Hefley, since I am currently Vice President of the Colorado Chapter of REP America, a national organization of Republicans for Environmental Protection.

When Buena Vista became my home in 1972, it was a mining town, but in 1981 the primary employer, the Climax mine, halted production for the first time in 57 years. Although the reopening of the mine someday could be a welcome addition to our local economy, tourism and outdoor recreation have now become the economic drivers. Over 75% of Chaffee County is comprised of federal public land managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Although our county contains a dozen mountains over 14,000 feet in elevation and portions of two previously designated Wilderness Areas, (Collegiate Peaks and Buffalo Peaks), I don't believe there is now any point in our county farther than 5 miles from a road! Land areas without roads are a rapidly decreasing yet totally sustainable and non-depletable economic resource. Visitors come from all over the world to experience the roadless areas we have left and I believe the best way to protect roadless areas is Wilderness designation by Congress.

My family founded the first whitewater rafting company located in Buena Vista. Now the upper Arkansas River in our county is the most heavily boated river in the United States, with over 90,000 people per year rafting the whitewater of the Browns Canyon section of the river alone. The regional rafting industry annually generates \$23 million in direct expenditures for a total economic impact of over \$60 million in the Arkansas River Valley. The proposed Browns Canyon Wilderness serves as a scenic backdrop for this activity and would be a valuable marketing tool for future whitewater rafting promotion. The idea of simply traveling right past a Wilderness is attractive to many people.

I have over the years covered much of our county on foot, including all of the "14'ers" (mountains over 14,000 feet in height), while leading commercial hiking trips and on many search and rescue missions. In my opinion there is no wilder place in our county than the proposed Browns Canyon Wilderness. It contains rugged canyons that are challenging to traverse. There is a wide variety of wildlife that thrives in the low arid terrain complimented by mid-elevation forest habitat. A Browns Canyon Wilderness would be a great addition to the current mountainous Wilderness Areas in our county because it is at lower elevation with different life zones. Lack of snow in winter months makes the area more accessible year-round than many of the existing wilderness areas in Colorado.

The 100,000-acre "Fourmile" Area immediately to the north contains numerous off-road vehicle (ORV) routes and abuse by some ORV users here has caused considerable loss of vegetation resulting in serious soil erosion. Wilderness designation will prevent the possibility of this kind of resource degradation in the proposed 20,000-acre area to the south.

I commend Congressman Hefley for his work in facilitating the compromises that went into the final boundaries for this proposal that now enjoys broad support from local individuals and organizations. It was his leadership that fostered the cooperation between two land management agencies resulting in an extraordinary Wilderness Area proposal containing both Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands.