

Testimony of the Honorable Joseph C. Donaldson
Mayor, City of Flagstaff (Arizona)

House Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
1324 Longworth House Office Building
March 16, 2005

Chairman Walden, Ranking Member Udall, members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to testify in support of H.R. 410, the Northern Arizona National Forest Land Exchange and Verde River Basin Partnership Act of 2005, which directs the Secretary of Agriculture to simultaneously convey title to certain land in the Prescott, Coconino, and Kaibab National Forests, Arizona, to the Yavapai Ranch Limited Partnership and the Northern Yavapai, L.L.C. (the Yavapai Ranch), in exchange for privately-owned land within the boundaries of the Prescott National Forest, Arizona.

I am especially appreciative Congressman Renzi is here today and is a lead sponsor of this important legislation along with our former congressman, J.D. Hayworth. It is important to note that H.R. 410 is almost identical to legislation that passed this subcommittee in 2003, as well as eventually the full committee, the House of Representatives and the Senate. Unfortunately, Congress ran out of time to act on the compromise legislation. That is why I am thankful Mr. Chairman that you are once again tackling this issue early in the 109th Congress. H.R. 410 is identical to its Senate companion bill, S. 161, which has already been unanimously passed out of Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on February 16, 2005 and is currently awaiting action by the full Senate.

The passage of the Northern Arizona National Forest Land Exchange and Verde River Basin Partnership Act of 2005 is critical to the future economic vitality of the City of Flagstaff. The proposed land exchange includes approximately 1,600 acres in the area around Flagstaff Pulliam Airport. The City, with first right of acquisition for a portion of this acreage, will have the opportunity to: (1) expand the municipal airport; (2) protect the airport from future encroachment; (3) address airport safety concerns; (4) expand the existing business park, and; (5) acquire land for future regional park development. This expanded business park will allow Flagstaff to supplement its tourist-based economy with more diversified business interests.

The addition of new businesses will provide the means with which Flagstaff will attract better and higher-paying jobs to the city. Flagstaff has little land available for immediate business park expansion, deterring many companies from relocating to the area, which affects our ability to expand our employment base. The 775-acre parcel retained by the owner is also designated for business/light industrial use in the Regional Plan.

The acquisition of land for future regional park development will not only serve local and regional recreational needs but also act as a buffer for residents along Lake Mary Road and the airport. One of the many reasons people choose Flagstaff is for the recreational opportunities it provides, such as hiking, biking, and skiing. The addition of this regional park will enhance these opportunities.

I would be remiss if I didn't state that this legislation is not only critically important to the City of Flagstaff, but also the Northern Arizona region. It is my understanding the Forest Service strongly supports this legislation, as it will consolidate lands within the Prescott National Forest that are currently checkboarded. The legislation also preserves old growth ponderosa and juniper from encroachment or future development.

Mr. Chairman, this bill is the result of careful consultation with cities, counties, the Forest Service, and affected constituents from northern Arizona and is the product of years of intense negotiations. The bill is strongly supported by the Flagstaff City Council and will provide economic and environmental advantages for northern Arizona. I urge you to strongly support H.R. 410 and expeditiously move this important legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Northern Arizona National Forest Land Exchange and Verde River Basin Partnership Act of 2005. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or other Members may have.