

Testimony by Commissioner Art Goodtimes, San Miguel County
March 11, 2010

I applaud Rep. Diana DeGette for being a protector of wild places and of preserving natural systems relatively free of human influences.

I count her as the esteemed dean of the Colorado congressional delegation, environmental ally, ideological colleague, and political friend.

I believe by championing this omnibus Colorado wilderness bill, she has given the Centennial State a grand vision of wilderness that we need to work towards putting into law. There are many areas most suitable for wilderness designation by the Congress included in the bill. But it's not a final picture. It's a rough draft.

The Omnibus bill needs to be fine-tuned. Ground-truthed. We need to have the kind of face-to-face hearings that Salazar's San Juan Mountains Wilderness Bill had, where ranchers sit down with enviros, hunters with motorized-users, hikers and bikers with rafters and professional guides, politicians with special-interest groups.

We need a full vetting process in which folks who live closest to wilderness boundaries have as much say as distant constituencies. We need a full round of negotiations, collaborations, round-table discussions like are becoming more common in rural Colorado, from the Dolores River Dialogue in Cortez to the Public Lands Partnership in Montrose.

I have been a lifelong champion of wilderness, a member of countless community groups devoted to wilderness protection, an activist who helped found our local environmental group in San Miguel County -- where I live and which is supporting Salazar's wilderness bill.

I'm chair of the San Miguel County Board of Commissioners, chair of my state county organization's Public Lands Steering Committee, and chair of the National Association of Counties' Gateway Communities Subcommittee.

I publicly supported Rep. DeGette's omnibus Colorado wilderness proposal when she first introduced it a number of years ago. My quote appeared on the Colorado Environmental Coalition brochure supporting her bill. The bill has not won a hearing before this committee until this very year.

In the years since I first supported it, I have met and talked with many Colorado citizens, both those for and those against wilderness. I've listened to constituents who know many of these areas intimately, and I've learned of numerous controversies and seen the on-the-ground skepticism of my rural commissioner colleagues, both progressive and conservative.

What Rep. DeGette has offered us in the omnibus bill here is a roadmap for investigation to begin the arduous and lengthy task of vettings, meetings, hearings, tours and detail work that will get us to wilderness designation for suitable public lands and some other suitable designation compatible with developing forest and resource management plans in Colorado forests.

I thank her for her vision. But I hope you will defer consideration of this omnibus bill at this time, and commend wilderness advocates to undertaking the region-by-region process that Rep. Salazar's bill has demonstrated – a process that should become the template for bringing new wilderness to fruition in Colorado