

Tom C. Stone
Eagle County Commissioner

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October 16, 2001

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of this Committee for the opportunity to speak in support of designation of certain lands as the Deep Creek Wilderness Area. Almost 86% of my County is publicly owned lands. As a Commissioner in Eagle County, I take my job as a responsible steward of these lands very seriously. Our County is home to world famous Vail ski area. As a result of our many recreational opportunities and incredible mountain vistas, we are also one of the fastest growing counties in the nation. As a board of County Commissioners, we constantly strive to strike a balance between responsible use of our lands and protection where warranted. Following the concept of multiple use of the Federal lands in Eagle County, we believe that the wise use of some property should be geared more towards active recreation. Other lands warrant a more passive use and the ultimate designation of Wilderness. Properly defined and regulated, Deep Creek affords a unique opportunity for almost all stakeholders to agree on this most protective establishment of Wilderness.

The Eagle County Board of Commissioners and the Garfield County Board of Commissioners both passed a resolutions unanimously that read in part, "Deep Creek has met the definition of wilderness by its scenic and ruggedly remote limestone canyon, which is up to 3,000 feet deep. It contains more than 40 caves, including Colorado's largest known cave. Deep Creek provides a pristine stream, lined with high-quality blue spruce, Douglas fir, and Red-Osier dogwood habitat, and is home for deer, elk, mountain lion, bald eagle, peregrine falcon, northern goshawk, Townsend's big-eared bat, round-tail chub, numerous songbirds and raptors". The Resolution goes on to say, "the proposed wilderness designation which is being supported herein includes the area contained rim to rim of Deep Creek totaling approximately 8,450 acres of which 2000 acres are in Eagle County and 6,450 acres are in Garfield County". The area that my board supports is one that is truly rugged and has very limited signs of the influence of man.

One of the most notable features of this proposed designation is something other than the property itself. The feature that I refer to is the process that Congressman McInnis used to craft this Bill. Congressman McInnis solicited a broad range of local input from County commissioners, private property owners, the Colorado River Water Conservation District, environmental groups and other stakeholders before submitting this Bill. Too many times we have seen just the opposite where someone will offer a Bill first and ask

questions later. Congressman McInnis should be commended on his commitment to local input, which has resulted in a thoughtful bill that combines the goals of local officials with environmental initiatives. This truly collaborative process has resulted in a bill that is ready for speedy passage with little or no change necessary. Trusting in the Forest Service's RARE II survey, which indicates a Roadless Area of 11,060 acres, and adjusting to protect private property and water rights, the boundaries that Congressman McInnis has proposed are appropriate. Permitted use by the Colorado Army National Guard, adherence to Colorado Water Law and the requirement of no Buffer Zones are all essential features of this Bill. Without these requirements our board could not support this legislation. Congressman McInnis has met the needs and all requirements necessary to satisfy us that all proper safeguards have been met.

I urge this Committee to pass this legislation as presented. Overly extended discussion will only serve to endanger these lands from ever gaining the designation that they deserve. Thank you for your time and public service to the great needs of this great nation.

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Eagle County, Colorado

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Resume

Education

B.S. Biology and Environmental Management

Fort Lewis College, Durango, Colorado

Experience and Affiliations

Eagle County Commissioner, Chairman of the Board

Colorado Counties, Inc. Public Lands Steering Committee

National Association of Counties Public Lands Steering Committee

Board Member of the Colorado River Water Conservation District

Board Member of Northwest Colorado Council of Governments

Water Quality and Quantity Committee

Governor Appointee to the Colorado Forest Advisory Board

