

Board of County Commissioners

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WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF FLOYD COOK

COUNTY COMMISSIONER OF DOLORES COUNTY, COLORADO

In Support of H.R. 4609 (Rep. Scott Tipton), The West Fork Fire Station Act of 2017, to provide for the conveyance of a Forest Service site in Dolores County, Colorado, to be used for a fire station.

Date of Hearing: February 15, 2018, 2:30 PM

Chairman McClintock, Ranking Member Hanabusa and distinguished members of the House Sub-Committee on Federal Lands:

I. INTRODUCTION

Thank you for holding today's hearing on H.R. 4609, to provide for the conveyance of a Forest Service site in Dolores County, Colorado, to be used for a fire station. My name is Floyd Cook, and I am one of three county commissioners in the County. The conveyance of the Forest Service parcel of approximately 3.61 acres would provide the final piece to a cooperative effort of citizens, local, state and federal government to bring a fire station to the West Fork area of Dolores County.

II. BACKGROUND

Dolores County overall consists of approximately one-third relatively flat farmland in the western portion of the County, with the remainder consisting of mostly forested rugged terrain. See, Exhibit A attached hereto. The West Fork area is an especially rugged and isolated forested area following the west fork of the Dolores River. The area consists of small patches of private residences surrounded by vast areas of National Forest. See, Exhibit B attached hereto. The area holds numerous recreational opportunities, including Forest Service trailheads, Forest Service campgrounds, and privately owned outdoor retreats. See, Exhibit C attached hereto. Visitors are attracted by the extensive trail system and world class fishing opportunities.

Historically, Dolores Fire Protection District located in Montezuma County to the South has responded out of its service area to any emergency calls in the West Fork area. However, the distance for those calls is approximately 26 miles one way. See, Exhibit D attached hereto. The vision of the West Fork Volunteer Fire Department began in earnest due in large part to the increasing burden being placed upon the surrounding Districts responding to calls in the West Fork area. Those distant responses financially burden the taxpayers of those outside districts, and divert resources in firefighters and equipment. While fire departments often provide service

outside of district boundaries, they typically do so under the authority of a mutual aid agreement. Without the ability to provide mutual aid, the residents and users of the West Fork area are wholly dependent upon gratuitous services, contingent upon availability.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORTS

Two years ago, the Board of County Commissioners of Dolores County began assisting a group of West Fork property owners with the creation of a volunteer fire department. The wide-spread and unanimous recognition of the need for such emergency services quickly prompted involvement on all levels. While the County continued to provide financial and administrative assistance to the development of the fire department, surrounding fire districts provided generous donations of vehicles and equipment. Operational grants have been received by both State and private funding organizations, as well as individuals.

The West Fork Volunteer Fire Department has developed into an organization fully capable of functioning in providing emergency services once a fire station is constructed. Four emergency vehicles have been obtained and prepared for service, but are currently held in storage. Volunteer firefighters have been recruited and trained through opportunities provided by surrounding fire districts. The final step in the creation of a fully functional fire department will be the construction of a main facility located adjacent to a County parcel at a location known as "Fish Creek". See, Exhibit E attached hereto.

IV. THE SUBJECT PARCEL

The proposed parcel initially consisted of 4.43 acres. The current configuration of 3.61 acres was a result of compromises that will still result in a highly useful and appropriate facility. The subject parcel is ideal for the proposed use. It is essentially a treeless sloping sliver of land between Dolores County Road 38 and a Dolores County road and bridge site. The site holds no recreational opportunity. The parcel is, however, perfect for the siting of a fire station. It has immediate access to the only main road, and will be serviceable by the County road and bridge department. The fire station will house vehicles and equipment, and serve as a staging area for the West Fork firefighters, as well as the surrounding mutual aid providers. The location of the facility will also make it ideal for the staging of U.S. Forest Service firefighting operations.

Dolores County explored other options in locating the facility, however, the subject parcel was simply ideal for the above stated reasons. The County explored housing the facility on the road and bridge parcel, but size restrictions and problems with the current potentially dangerous access point, simply made that choice impractical. Surrounding property owners were also contacted, but unwilling to provide suitable property.

V. THE FACILITY

Due to the extremely generous donation of \$100,000.00 from a private citizen, the construction costs of the fire station will be met. Immediately following conveyance of the site pursuant to H.R. 4609, construction could commence. Dolores County will provide in kind contributions of heavy equipment and operators to prepare the building site, as well as construction of a new

driveway with culverts and signage. We hope to have a fully operational facility, providing fire protection to the West Fork area, and assisting with mutual aid to surrounding districts and the Forest Service this summer. Given the dry winter in our area, we unfortunately expect a busy year.


VI. CLOSING

Bringing emergency services to the West Fork area has truly been a multilevel group effort. From private citizens, to multiple special districts, County government, State government and up to the Federal level, all parties have seen the need and participated in making the vision a reality. The U.S. Forest Service testified on February 7, 2018 before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests and Mining on the Senate companion, S. 2218. The U.S. Forest Service "supports Dolores County in their efforts to provide improved emergency services to county residents and visitors." The Forest Service "agrees that the parcel of land in question is in a practical location to provide" emergency management services and "there are not similarly situated non-federal lands of limited acreage available that provide the same locational benefits."

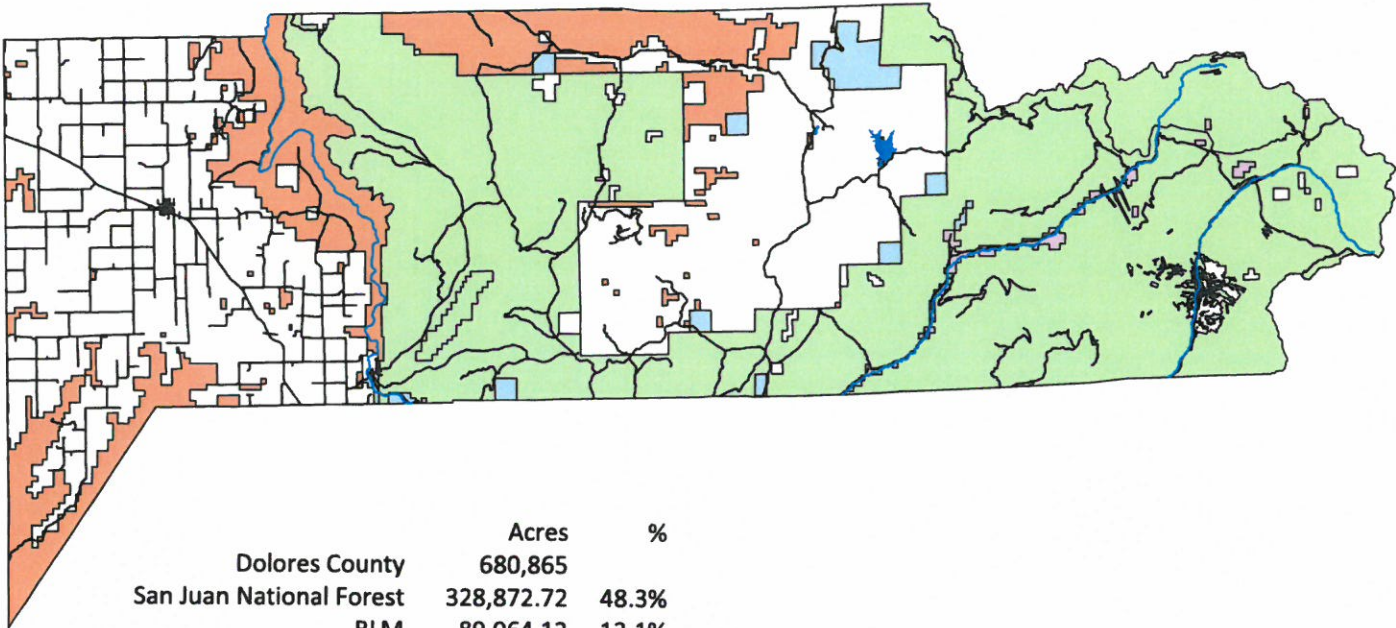
We appreciate your support in this endeavor and kindly ask that you will pass the "West Fork Fire Station Act of 2017" to make this cooperative effort to bring fire protection to the West Fork area a reality.

Sincerely,

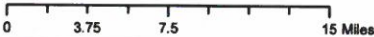
DOLORES COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS


Floyd Cook, Commissioner

DOLOROS COUNTY, CO



	Acres	%
Dolores County	680,865	
San Juan National Forest	328,872.72	48.3%
BLM	89,064.12	13.1%
Other – Private & State	262,928.15	38.6%



Legend

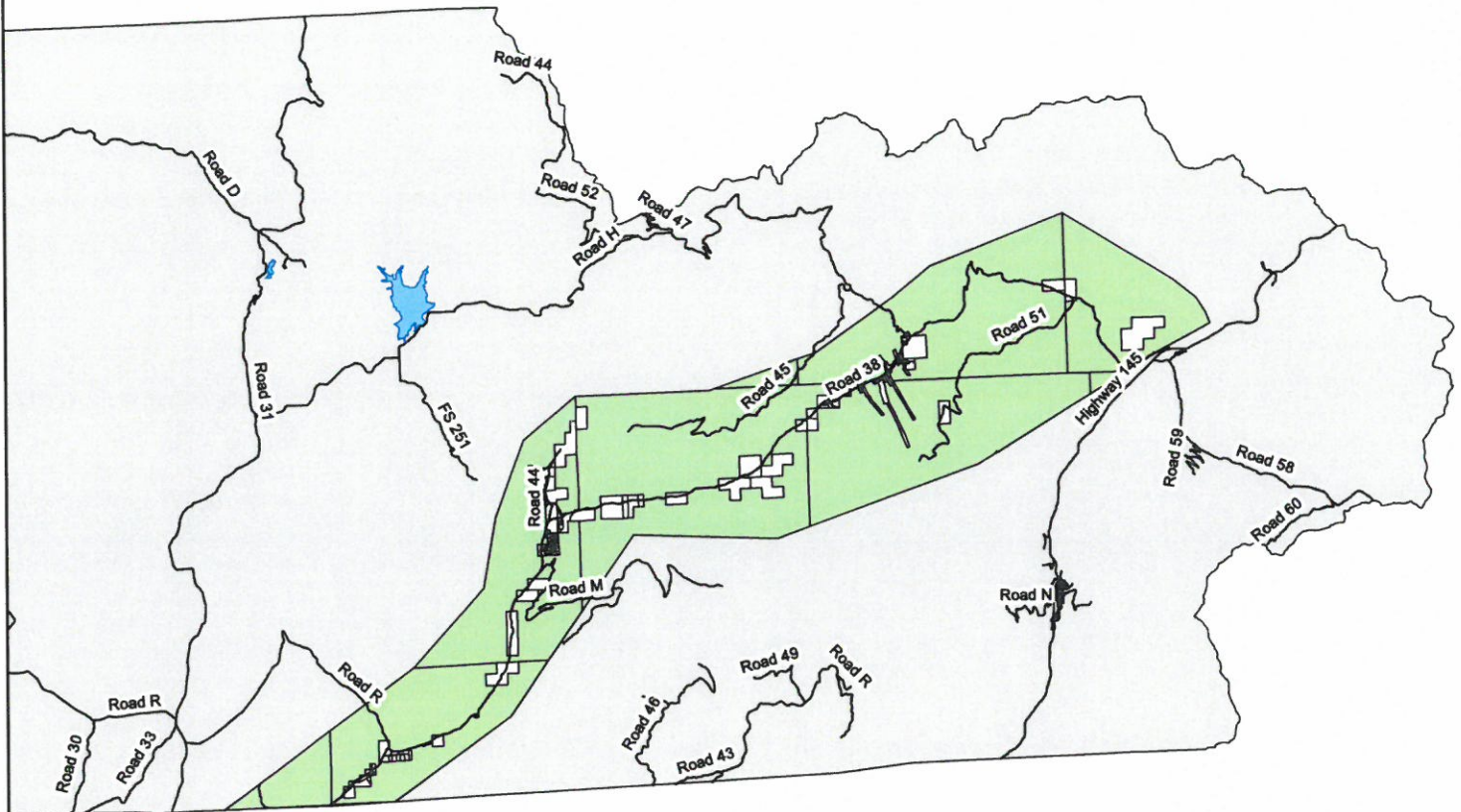
Dolores CO Publands

OWNER

- BLM
- COLORADO
- PVT
- USFS

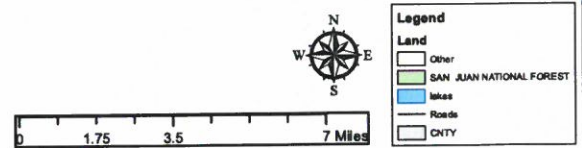
Exhibit A
Floyd Cook testimony in support of H.R. 4609

Proposed Service Area



	Acres	%
Proposed Service Area	49,349	
San Juan National Forest	45,199	91.6%
Other - Private and State	4,150	8.4%

Exhibit B
Floyd Cook testimony in support of H.R. 4609



West Fork Recreation

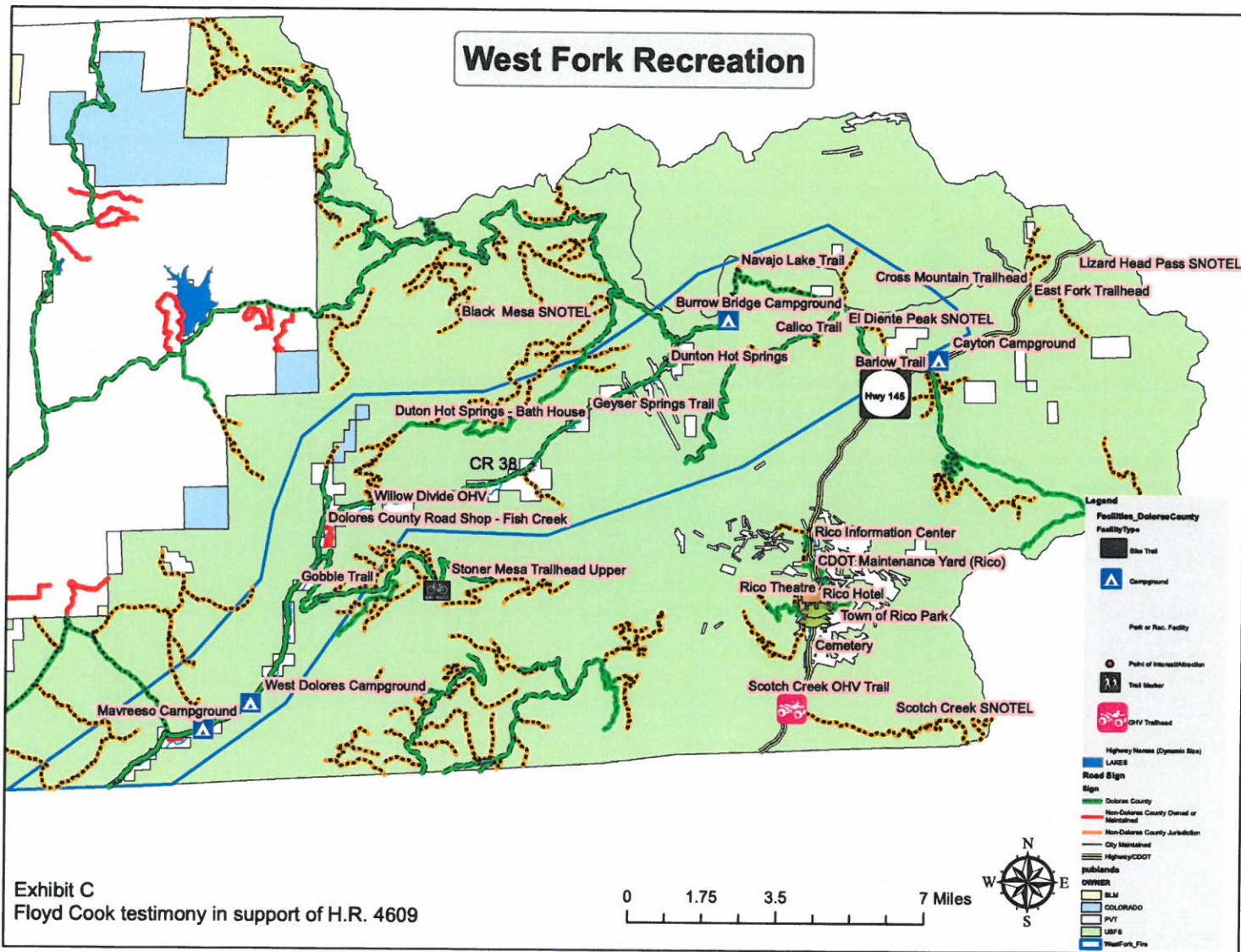


Exhibit C
Floyd Cook testimony in support of H.R. 4609

Proposed West Fork Fire Station and Existing Fire Stations

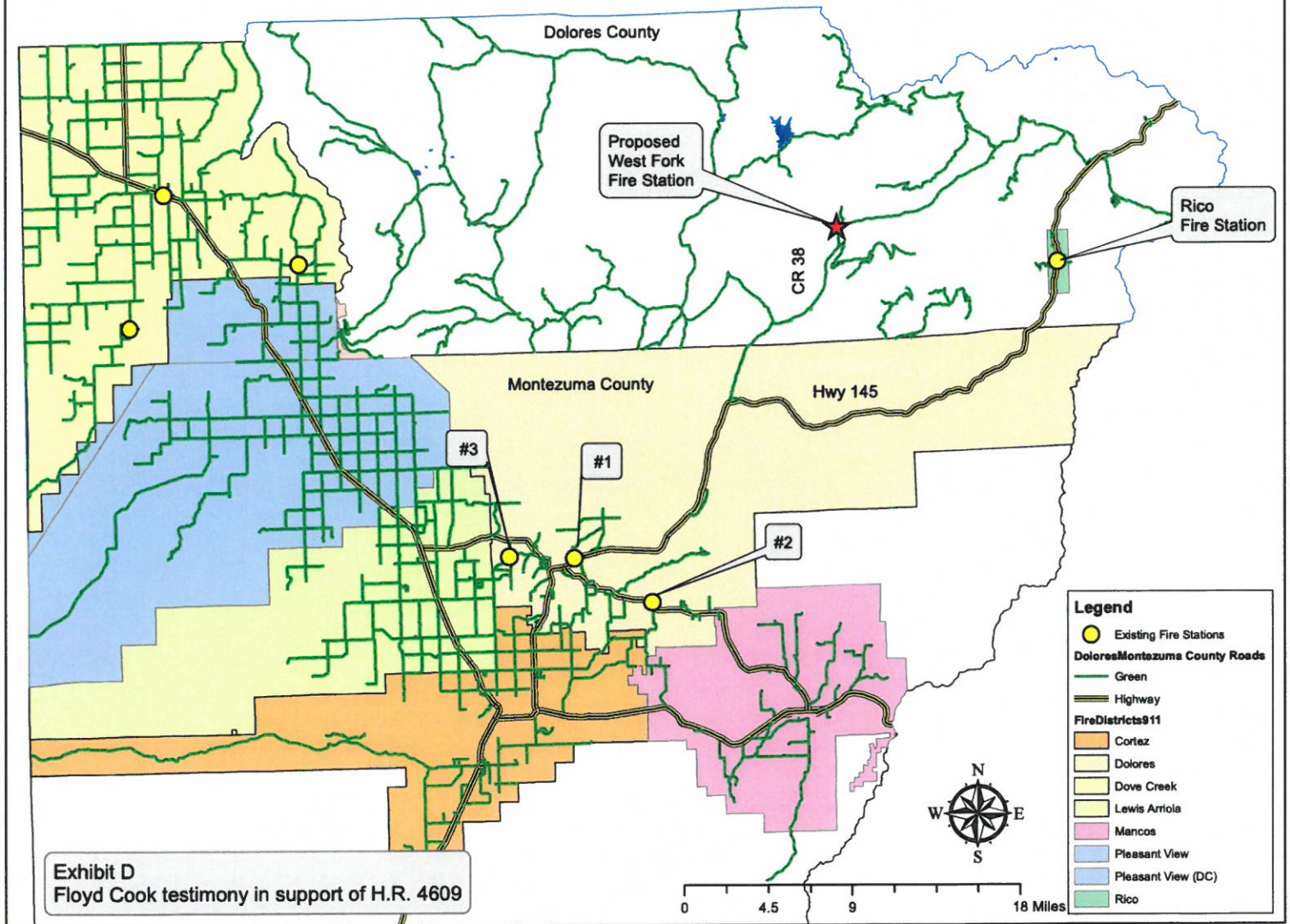


Exhibit D
Floyd Cook testimony in support of H.R. 4609

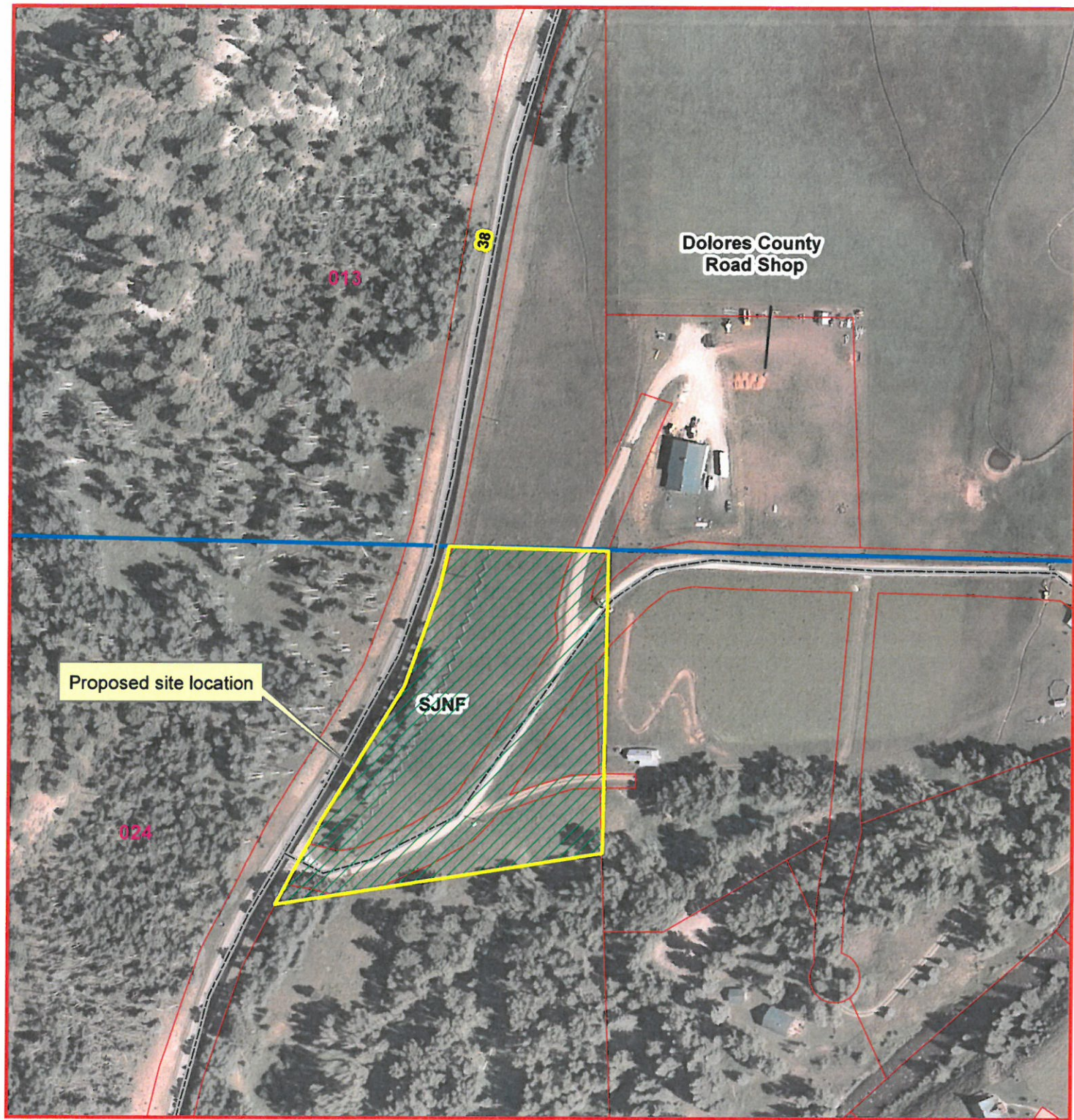


Exhibit E
Floyd Cook testimony in support of H.R. 4609

0 0.02 0.04 0.08 Miles



Legend

— Roads_DoloresCounty

□ PLSS

□ Parcel

DoloresCO2010_1foot.sid

RGB

Red: Band_1

Green: Band_2

Blue: Band_3