



Written Testimony of Siri Roman, General Manager
Eagle River Water & Sanitation District and Upper Eagle Regional Water Authority
Before the House Subcommittee on Federal Lands of the Committee on Natural Resources
Hearing on H.R. 4297, "Bolts Ditch Act"
January 31, 2024

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Siri Roman, and I am testifying in support of H.R. 4297 in my role as General Manager of the Eagle River Water & Sanitation District and the Upper Eagle Regional Water Authority. The District and Authority are municipal water and wastewater providers that serve more than 50,000 people in the Colorado mountain resort communities of Vail, Beaver Creek, and the surrounding areas. Together, we are the second largest water provider in Western Colorado.

This legislation is needed because a minor mapping error occurred in 1980 when the Holy Cross Wilderness was originally designated. The Bolts Ditch, which was used to fill a water storage reservoir that was originally constructed in the early 1900s, was mistakenly included in the wilderness boundary. While the Bolts Ditch diversion structure is only 450 feet within the Holy Cross boundary, the wilderness designation prevented the continued use, maintenance, and repair of Bolts Ditch and its diversion structure.

In 2019, the Town of Minturn sought a narrow wilderness exemption in order to rehabilitate Bolts Ditch as part of its municipal water system. The John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act directed the Secretary of Agriculture to permit non-motorized access exclusively to the town of Minturn to use, maintain, and repair the Bolts Ditch diversion structure and 450 lineal feet of Bolts Ditch.

The Bolts Ditch Act is a simple amendment to the Dingell Act, explicitly granting the District and Authority the same access as the Town of Minturn.

For the betterment of our watershed and community, the District, Authority, and the Town of Minturn, are working together to rehabilitate the Bolts Lake diversion structure and ditch. The Town of Minturn supports this legislation, and their Town Manager, Michelle Metteer, is joining me at this hearing.

The District and Authority's service area is located in the headwaters of the Colorado River basin in Eagle County. Like many areas of the mountain west, approximately 80% of our region's precipitation falls in the form of snow in our high mountain peaks. The vast majority of the annual water supply reaches our local stream systems within a very short period of time during spring snowmelt. A reservoir to capture the spring runoff is essential to provide water on a year-round basis for our residents and visitors.

In 2021, the District and Authority acquired ownership of Bolts Ditch and the Bolts Lake property to construct a new 1,200 acre foot reservoir at the previous Bolts Lake site. It will be an off-channel reservoir, meaning it will not dam any free-flowing streams.

Bolts Ditch is an essential filling source for the new Bolts Lake Reservoir and will help to provide sufficient municipal water supplies for our region, including the Town of Minturn. Bolts Lake will boost environmental flows during times of low flow and will provide additional recreation opportunities to support Western Colorado's recreation-based economy.

The purpose of this legislation is to grant the District and Authority explicit access to use, maintain, and repair the Bolts Ditch diversion, and it will make the redevelopment of Bolts Lake, and all its benefits, possible.

We would be grateful for your support of this legislation.

Supporting this written testimony are the following materials:

Attachment A: Overview of Bolts Ditch and Bolts Lake Reservoir

Attachment B: Map of Bolts Ditch area, south of Minturn, CO

Attachment C: Photograph of Bolts Ditch intake and diversion structure

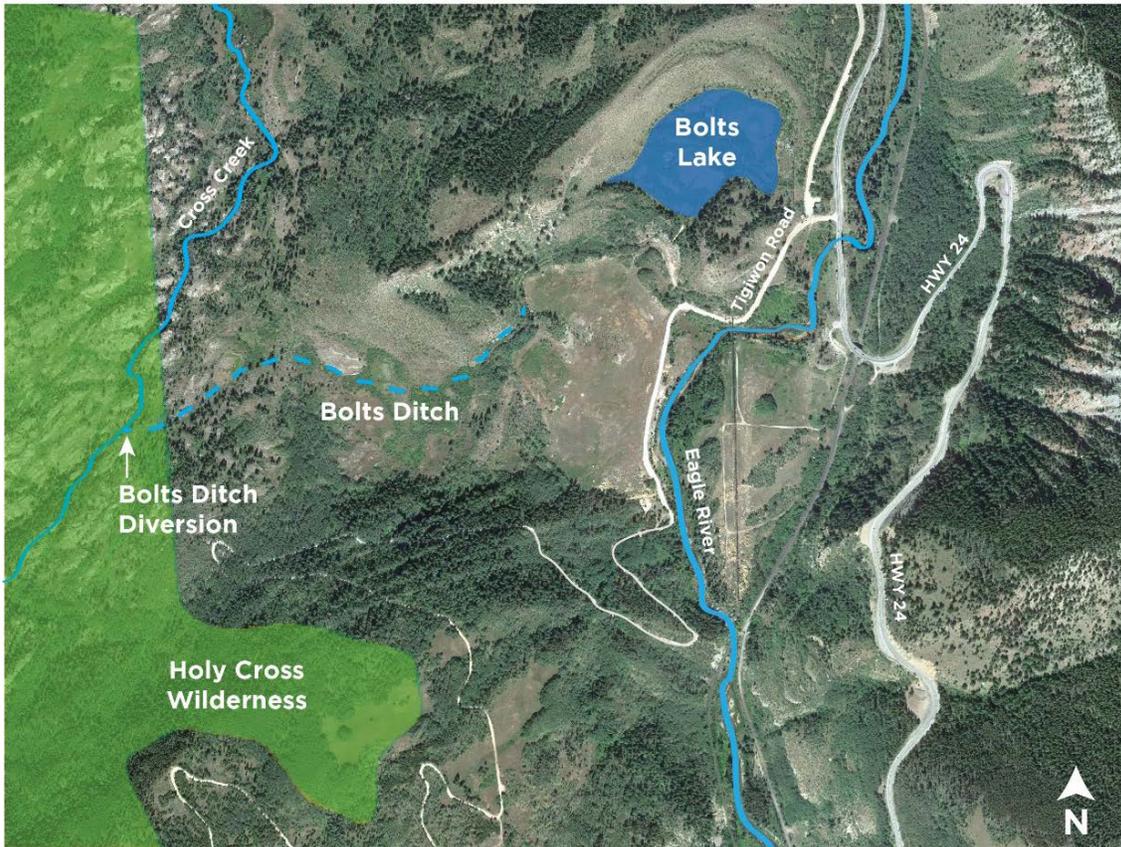
Attachment D: Photograph of Bolts Ditch diversion structure



Overview of Bolts Ditch and Bolts Lake Reservoir

Eagle River Water & Sanitation District (ERWSD) and Upper Eagle Regional Water Authority (UERWA) are planning to redevelop Bolts Lake in Minturn with a 1,200 acre-foot reservoir. The reservoir was originally developed as a recreational reservoir by Ben Bolt in 1890, when he diverted water from Cross Creek into a natural basin. The reservoir has been inactive since 1996, when the dam was breached by order of Colorado's State Engineer. ERWSD and UERWA serve 50,000 customers and are collectively the second largest municipal water supplier in Western Colorado. This reservoir will provide necessary additional in-basin storage supplies to service their customers while maintaining healthy river flows. Bolts Ditch is an essential filling source for the new Bolts Lake Reservoir and will help to provide sufficient municipal water supplies for our region, including the town of Minturn.

Attachment B: Map of Bolts Ditch area, south of Minturn, CO



Attachment C: Photograph of Bolts Ditch intake and diversion structure



Attachment D: Photograph of Bolts Ditch diversion structure

