

Statement of Congressman Scott Tipton
Thursday November 3, 2011
Before the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 2621, the “Chimney Rock National Monument
Establishment Act of 2011”

Thank you Mr. Chairman for convening today’s hearing and including my bill, H.R. 2621, to designate Chimney Rock in Southwestern Colorado as a National Monument. I want to thank Senator Bennett for being here today in support of the bill. His contribution on this legislation in the Senate has been instrumental in getting the bill where it is today and I’m proud to work with him on this bipartisan effort. I also want to thank Ricky Lightfoot from my hometown of Cortez, Colorado for being here to share his expertise on this treasured area and I look forward to hearing his testimony.

Chimney Rock is considered by the historic preservation community and the archeological community to be one of the most significant archeological sites in the Western United States, however, many Coloradans may have never heard of the historic treasure right in our own backyard. Once held sacred by the ancestors of modern Pueblo Indians who made the journey to this northernmost outpost of the Chacoan Civilization, Chimney Rock is one of only three such sites known to exist.

The area is known primarily as a gathering place by these early Native Americans to observe the rare and dramatic lunar standstill. Centuries ago, hundreds of early Native Americans called the area home and archeologists have uncovered ancient farming areas, homes and other structures indicating that this was a major cultural center for early Americans.

Despite the unique nature of this area, the Chimney Rock site of the San Juan National Forest is lacking a designation worthy of its historical and cultural significance. The area is currently under the management of the U.S. Forest Service, and is covered under the USFS Organic Act, which has no provision to address the preservation and management of such a historic and cultural significant site as Chimney Rock. As a National Monument, Chimney Rock will be carefully preserved and restored so that future generations will have the opportunity to visit the awe-inspiring site, interpret its meaning, and study the people that built these structures so long ago.

This designation would increase attention and interest and generate new tourism opportunities for the Four Corners area, potentially generating badly needed revenue and expand potential for new jobs in the Southwest Colorado region ravaged by double-digit unemployment. Chimney Rock would remain open to many of the traditional uses for this area. This would ensure that local ranchers will be able to keep utilizing the lands they depend on for grazing, outdoorsman will be able to continue to take advantage of the game opportunities in the area, and would allow for the continued use of Chimney Rock by members of the Indian tribes for traditional ceremonies.

The national monument designation requires no additional federal funds, and therefore no increase in spending. However, it does allow for private supporters to work with the Forest

Service to improve and maintain this valued area. This allows for the preservation of Chimney Rock in a way that is fiscally responsible.

This legislation is a great example of a community based effort to establish one of its most valued areas as a national monument taking into account all of the various interests affected by that designation and doing so in a way that does not increase costs to American taxpayers.

I'm proud to have the support of the Archuleta County Commissioners, and the Pagosa Springs Chamber of Commerce, among others. Making Chimney Rock a national monument would create a win-win situation for this remarkable historic, cultural area, the state of Colorado, the local communities, Native Indian tribes and future generations of visitors.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.