



Rio Grande Watershed
Association of Conservation Districts
0048 CR 10 North
Center, Colorado 81125

March 15, 2015

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 21505—0603

Attn: Representative Scott R. Tipton

Re: Support of the Water Rights Protection Act

Gentlemen:

The Rio Grande Watershed Association of Conservation Districts (RGWACD) strongly support the *Water Rights Protection Act* (WRPA). The RGWACD is dedicated solely to representing the roughly 2,000 ranchers who operate on federal lands, some of which are U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands, Here in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. RGWACD is one of the most active conservation district—watershed groups in Colorado. We represent all faction sof agriculture producer and landowner who provide much of the nation’s supply of food and own or manage a large portion of America’s private property. Many of our members also hold private water rights on federal lands, which serve as an integral part of their operations; thus, these water rights keep our members in business and rural communities thriving. However, landowners face an unprecedented threat to the future of their water rights on lands managed by the USFS.

The USFS has been notorious for violating private property rights, as they have recently attempted to require the transfer of privately owned water rights to the federal government. The USFS has not provided adequate compensation as required by Article V of the Constitution; instead, they have attempted to acquire these rights in exchange for special use permits, likely in violation of a recent Supreme Court ruling in *Koontz*. Furthermore, the USFS has repeatedly ignored established state water laws in order to perform these takes, which amounts to a vast overreach by the federal government.

The Water Rights Protection act comes as a means to combat the recent directive that allows the USFS to execute the seizure of these water rights without just compensation. The language in the directive is applicable to ski areas specifically; however, this issue is a threat to all water users, including ranchers, as they depend on these rights to keep their business viable.

This legislation would prohibit the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture from, requiring the transfer of water rights without adequate compensation. Additionally, the bill supports long-established state water laws, clarifying that the federal government does not have jurisdiction.

We strongly encourage the Natural Resource Committee to support this important legislation. We thank you for your attention to this crucial issue, and for supporting our members as they continue to be an essential part of rural communities and stewards of our public lands.

Sincerely,

Harold Anderson

Rio Grande Watershed Association of Conservation Districts
President