STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE SCOTT R. TIPTON (CO-03)
ON THE FLOOR OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
OPPOSITION OF H.R.823 THE CORE ACT
WASHINGTON, DC
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Madam Chair: When it comes to public lands management, Colorado has a long history of balancing the interests of a broad range of stakeholders, including the needs and interests of citizens who may not be the most vocal on the issues. This is accomplished through proactive outreach to communities and engagement with citizens and local leaders who know their areas best.

This type of local engagement has proven effective on previous public land efforts, such as protecting Hermosa Creek and Chimney Rock in Southwest Colorado.

In both cases, there was an extensive and inclusive community outreach process, with many months of bipartisan work, negotiations and conversations with stakeholders from all sides of the debate. The result was the House passing bipartisan measures to protect these invaluable open spaces, both of which became law (one by executive order and one through the legislative process).

Behind these efforts was a recognition of historic multiple uses of the land as well as for the communities who live there.

For many decades, Colorado has responsibly developed natural resources on public lands, which has provided critical funding for emergency services, education, and infrastructure for rural communities that would otherwise be unable to have these services. While doing this, Colorado has also embraced a thriving outdoor economy and protected access to public lands for historical uses, as well as for sportsmen and other recreational access.

We have prioritized the conservation of delicate ecosystems and habitats, protected cultural and historic sites, and defended private property and water rights. There are certainly disagreements on the most effective ways to carry out these ideas, but most of us agree that the most effective approach to work through those disagreements is by listening to local communities and those most affected by federal decisions, and finding a way to incorporate those ideas into balanced legislation.

Unfortunately, we have not seen this same type of outreach, negotiation and local engagement with the CORE Act as a whole.

Some stakeholders and communities in the 3rd District were not included. It's important that we don't discount 3rd District voices who feel like they were excluded or that their concerns were disregarded.

Madam Chair, I have heard from numerous county commissioners who had not been involved in the legislative process for the CORE Act and have simply asked to have their concerns addressed before a House vote takes place. This is the same feedback I have repeatedly heard from some stakeholders and local elected officials in the 3rd District following public meetings on these issues over the past few months.

I am not saying that there is no support for the CORE Act in the 3rd District, because there is. Many of our resort and mountain communities are strongly behind the bill, and it is just as important to listen to their input as those in the rest of Western Colorado.

I am optimistic that we can find a balanced public lands bill that reflects all these communities, but it can't happen if one side is left out of the conversation from the beginning. More outreach needs to happen, negotiations need to take place, and compromises need to be made.

The commissioners, other local elected officials, and stakeholders in the counties that have not yet been included have experiences, knowledge and opinions that should be given due consideration when crafting a public lands bill that directly impacts many of them and

indirectly impacts all of them. We are firmly committed to giving all counties in the 3rd District the opportunity to have their voices heard and their ideas included in any public land legislation that impacts their region.

During a House Natural Resources Committee hearing on the CORE Act and before the House Rules Committee this week, I introduced amendments that included reasonable and necessary additions to the bill based on direct feedback from 3rd District stakeholders and officials. I provided my colleagues from Colorado who sponsor the legislation in both the House and Senate with a similar list of items for inclusion beforehand.

These suggestions include protections for existing water and grazing rights, codification of the U.S. Army High Altitude Aviation Training Site's flight guideless over wilderness areas, allowing for current public land management activities to continue in recreation areas, and language to ensure that leaseholders in the Thompson Divide are fairly compensated for the value of their leases.

These amendments are not controversial, they are not partisan, and they do not disrupt or alter the outcomes of the bill. What these

amendments do is ensure there is no ambiguity in the intent of the legislation as stated by the bill's sponsors and supporters.
There is great harm in ambiguity, which is what will result if these amendments are not accepted.

I also offered two amendments to release wilderness study areas at the request of the counties in which they are located. Most of these areas have been deemed unsuitable for a wilderness designation. That does not mean they won't be protected public lands, because they all have some measure of protection.

Madam Chair, responsible management is not always the result of more restrictive designations. Instead it can also mean giving local communities greater flexibility to address local land challenges.

In a recent testimony given to the House Natural Resources Committee, Montezuma County Commissioner Keenan Ertel, made the argument for releasing wilderness study areas when they have been deemed unsuitable by federal land management agencies for wilderness protections.
Seven years ago, the Menefee Mountain Wilderness Study Area was ravaged by a fire. Years after the fire, noxious weeds consumed much

of the landscape and due to the stringent protections given to the area, the weed concerns continue to persist.

Local agencies are limited in their ability to proactively manage these invasive species because of the stringent wilderness protections that remain in place. If the Colorado delegation is truly vested in passing a state-wide public lands bill that has broad local consensus, why aren't we including the removal of these areas that rely on federal action to allow for better management of their lands?

I have suggested this my bicameral Colorado colleagues and even submitted an amendment, but it was not adopted. I continue to hear that local concerns have been addressed, and yet cannot assure the Montezuma county residents that theirs have even had fair consideration.

Along with allowing local communities greater access to protect their cherished open spaces safe from potential wildfires, also includes buffer zones between wilderness and non-wilderness areas.
A look at the devastating wildfires in Colorado over the years shows us how important this is. In 2013, the West Fork Complex Fire which burned over 100,000 acres in Southwest Colorado and is a prime

example of how forest fires have no regard to arbitrary lines drawn on a map.

Unfortunately, the aftermath of this fire and other fires threaten stability of roads, water quality and greater erosion threats for many years to come.

I raised this concern with the sponsor of the bill, suggesting that we increase the offsets for trails running on the borders of wilderness from 50 feet to 150 feet. With this reasonable ask, I believe we can eliminate unnecessary risks to our forests and protect them from any future forest fires that have the potential to jump across boundaries into other public or private lands.
Yet this amendment was not allowed to move to the floor for consideration. Nor were 8 out of the eleven I introduced.

Had there been greater outreach across the 3rd District, the CORE Act's sponsors would have heard more examples just like these that need to be addressed. This week alone we have received letters or messages from Mesa, Montezuma, Dolores, Rio Blanco, Montrose counties who all have various concerns with the CORE Act as it is today.

Madam Chair, I applaud the CORE Act's sponsor and my Colorado colleague Mr. Neguse for his passion to protect public lands in Colorado.

We share that passion.

However, Colorado's 3rd District where most of his bill would have an impact – not Mr. Neguse's – and I would be remiss if I didn't speak out on behalf of my constituents who have yet to have their voices heard in this process or their issues addressed.

I am optimistic that we could eventually get broad community consensus throughout the 3rd District on the CORE Act, but first there is outreach to be done, issues to work out, and compromises to be made.

There is no doubt that the CORE Act will pass the House tomorrow and head to the Senate. While I will vote no tomorrow on this current version of the bill, it is my hope that as the Senate considers it, my amendments will be included, and that continued outreach occurs to include the ideas of all of Western Colorado. I stand ready to work with them.

I yield back.