



## THE SOUTHWESTERN WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Developing and Conserving the Waters of the  
SAN JUAN AND DOLORES RIVERS AND THEIR TRIBUTARIES  
IN SOUTHWESTERN COLORADO

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May 16, 2017

The Honorable Scott Tipton  
United States House of Representatives  
218 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Tipton:

On behalf of the Southwestern Water Conservation District ("District"), I thank you for once again sponsoring the *Water Rights Protection Act* (WRPA) during the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress. The District has supported past efforts to move this legislation forward in both the 113<sup>th</sup> and 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, and although the current legislation will not be considered by the Board for an official position until their June meeting, it is important to continue with this effort. This vital bipartisan bill would prohibit the conditioning of any permit, lease, or other use agreement on the transfer, relinquishment, or other impairment of any water right to the United States by the Secretaries of the Interior or Agriculture.

The Southwestern Water Conservation District (SWCD) was established by the Colorado legislature to conserve and protect the waters of the San Juan and Dolores Rivers and their tributaries. Therefore, we see it as our statutory obligation to safeguard privately held water rights in the region and uphold the primacy of state water law, as the current version of the Water Rights Protection Act would do.

The U.S. Forest Service has recently attempted to require the transfer of privately held water rights to the federal government as a condition of acquiring a National Forest System lands permit. On a local level, the Forest Service continues to pursue aggressive positions in their Forest Plan and permitting, as well as filing water court objections such as the Purgatory Ski Area water rights case within our District. The District considers such requirements tantamount to a federal taking, and this has been the basis for continued support to pass the WRPA.

Although an official position on the current legislation will not occur until the June meeting, the District has been supportive of past versions of WRPA, and still sees the need for legislation to be considered by the House of Representatives.

The District thanks you for introducing the *Water Rights Protection Act* and for your leadership on this issue of great consequence.

Sincerely,

Bruce Whitehead  
Executive Director