

## UNITED STATES CONGRESS

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### **Bennet, Tipton Reintroduce Companion Bills to Preserve Hermosa Creek Watershed**

*Bill Would Protect More Than 100,000 Acres in San Juan National  
Forest, Designate 38,000 acres of new Wilderness*

**Washington, DC** – Colorado U.S. Senator Michael Bennet and Representative Scott Tipton are introducing a bill to protect more than 100,000 acres of the Hermosa Creek Watershed, an area in the San Juan National Forest north of Durango. The bill would establish management for the Hermosa Creek Watershed based on recommendations from the Hermosa Creek River Protection Workgroup, which included local water officials, conservationists, sportsmen, mountain bikers, off-road-vehicle users, outfitters, property owners, grazing permit holders and other interested citizens. Bennet’s bill was introduced today, while Tipton will introduce his bill in the House as early as tomorrow.

“We are lucky in Colorado to be able to enjoy many of the country’s most beautiful landscapes in our backyards. The Hermosa Creek Watershed represents some of the best Colorado has to offer,” **Bennet said**. “This bill will protect this land for our outdoor recreation economy and for future generations of Coloradans and Americans to enjoy. It is the result of a local effort that took into account the varied interests of the community, and that cooperation helped us put together a strong bill with the community’s input.”

“As one of Colorado’s most scenic areas, Hermosa Creek has long been treasured by the local community and by countless visitors who have explored all that the region has to offer,” **Tipton said**. “Local stakeholders including snowmobilers, anglers, hunters, other outdoor enthusiasts, elected officials, miners and Southwest Colorado residents have voiced their support to preserve the Hermosa Creek watershed and the multiple use recreation opportunities it provides. In response to this locally driven effort, Senator Bennet and I have joined together to put forward legislation to, without any additional cost to taxpayers, protect and preserve this special place, and ensure that Coloradans as well as visitors to our great state have the opportunity to experience Hermosa Creek’s abundant natural beauty for generations to come.”

“On behalf of the La Plata County Commissioners, I thank Senator Bennet and Congressman Tipton for their great work for the interests of La Plata County citizens,” **said Julie Westendorff, La Plata County Commissioner.** “This bill protects the clean waters of our Hermosa Creek and promotes the responsible use of federal lands for the recreation that supports our economy and sustains our quality of life.”

“We are very excited about this bill. We are hopeful that all the hard work and cooperative partnership that went into the Hermosa Creek Watershed Protection Act will lead to the swift passage of this bill for the benefit of Southwest Colorado and all the visitors to our area.” **said Pete McKay, San Juan County Commissioner.**

“The Hermosa Creek Wilderness bill rests on a foundation of broadly-based stakeholder input,” **said Dick White, mayor of Durango.** “It will protect the watershed while preserving historical and recreational values. In addition, it provides protection for iconic scenic and recreational areas near the City of Durango. The bill will contribute both to the natural amenities that attract residents and tourists to Southwest Colorado and to the economic benefits that they bring.”

“It was my privilege to represent the interests of the Southwestern Water Conservation District and San Juan County, Colorado during this process. Interests of the Southwestern Water Conservation District included protecting existing water rights and uses; and, the potential for future water development. The interests of San Juan County included protecting existing water quality, county road access, mineral development potential, forest product harvesting, and recreational uses,” **wrote Stephen Fearn, President, Jo Grant Mining Company, Inc.** “Both the District and San Juan County have voted to support the proposed legislation.”

The bill, which is cosponsored by Senator Mark Udall, would designate roughly 108,000 acres of San Juan National Forest land as the *Hermosa Creek Watershed Protection Area*. Much of the land would remain open to all historic uses of the forest under the bill, including mountain biking, motorized recreation, and selective timber harvesting. Grazing will continue to be allowed in the entire watershed.

In accordance with the consensus recommendations of the Hermosa Creek Workgroup, roughly 38,000 acres of the watershed would be set aside as wilderness, to be managed in accordance with *The Wilderness Act of 1964*. No roads or mineral development are permitted in wilderness areas; while hunting, fishing, horseback riding and non-mechanized recreation are allowed.

Per the community recommendations the following trails all remain open to mountain biking: Hermosa Creek, Dutch Creek, Elbert Creek, Corral Draw, the Colorado Trail, Little Elk Creek, Jones Creek, Pinkerton-Flagstaff and Goulding Creek. Also, in keeping with the community recommendations, the following trails will remain open to motorized use: Hermosa Creek, Jones Creek, Pinkerton Flagstaff, Dutch Creek and Corral Draw. In addition the bill will allow areas in the Hermosa Creek watershed currently used by snowmobiling to remain open to that use. Also, at the request of Silverton and San Juan County, the bill ensures areas currently open to snowmobiling on Molas Pass will remain open for that use.

The bill contains several provisions to provide for active land management in areas designated by the bill as necessary to control wildfires, insect infestations and disease outbreaks. Finally, per the request of the Durango City Council and La Plata County Commission, the bill would prohibit future federal mineral leasing on Animas Mountain, Perins Peak, Ridges Basin and Horse Gulch.

Supporters of the bill include the [City of Durango](#), the [La Plata County Commission](#), the [San Juan County Commission](#), the [Wilderness Society](#), [Trails 2000](#), [Four Corners Back Country Horsemen](#), [Jo Grant Mining Company, Inc.](#), in addition to numerous [business and sportsmen groups](#), among others.

In 2011, Bennet wrote an [op-ed](#) in the Durango Herald, outlining his plans to seek feedback from interested Coloradans to build on the framework the workgroup set for the bill. The Durango Herald [published an editorial](#) in favor of the bill following its initial introduction in 2012.

For more information on the bill and Hermosa Creek, visit Bennet's website at <http://www.bennet.senate.gov/hermosacreek/>.