

Testimony
West Fork Fire Station Act of 2017 (H.R. 4609)

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this hearing and bringing my bill, the West Fork Fire Station Act of 2017 up for consideration. I also want to thank Dolores County Commissioner Floyd Cook for traveling to DC to testify in support of this bill.

West Fork is in a remote part of Dolores County, Colorado, surrounded by the San Juan National Forest. Emergency and fire response is a challenge in this part of the County, because the closest fire station is currently 26 miles away.

The West Fork Fire Station Act conveys approximately 3.6 acres of National Forest System land to Dolores County for the strict purpose of building and operating a fire station in the West Fork Area.

In addition to creating emergency and fire response challenges, the lack of a dedicated fire station has created insurance challenges for homeowners in West Fork. In an area surrounded by National Forest land, it is critical to have fire insurance for your home and other structures on your property. With no fire station in a reasonable

proximity to the area, it is near impossible for homeowners to obtain fire insurance in West Fork. My bill would help change that.

I would also like to note that the West Fork Fire Station will be operated by a volunteer fire department – men and women who dedicate their time, talent, and often put the safety of their community and neighbors ahead of their own. I greatly appreciate their service to the County.

I also commend Dolores County for working with local property owners and the surrounding Fire Districts to obtain necessary firefighting equipment for the volunteers that would serve at the West Fork Fire Station.

My team and I have engaged with the Board of County Commissioners, as well as with my Colorado colleagues in the U.S. Senate, to develop the proposed land exchange. The county, Colorado U.S. Senators Gardner and Bennet, and the Forest Service support the proposal. At this time I would like to enter into the record a letter from Dolores County Commissioners Julie Kibel, Steve Garchar, and Floyd Cook outlining their support for the West Fork Fire Station Act of 2017. I would also like to submit for the record recent testimony that was given by U.S.

Forest Service Associate Deputy Chief, Glenn Casamassa, before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands during a hearing on the Senate companion of this bill. In his testimony, Mr. Casamassa said, “USDA supports Dolores County in their efforts to provide improved emergency service to county residents and visitors. We agree that the parcel of land in question is in a practical location to provide these services and that there are not similarly situated non-federal lands of limited acreage available to provide the same locational benefits.”

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to answering any questions you may have about this bill and yield back.