FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sixth Colorado County Declares Opposition to Fee Demo

Gunnison is the sixth county and ninth elected body in Colorado to go on record urging Congress to fully fund federal lands with regular appropriations, not with recreational user fees. The Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners voted unanimously to oppose the federal Recreational Fee Demonstration program (Fee Demo). The Commission stated its opposition to any Fee Demo sites being established anywhere in the Gunnison River watershed. Similar resolutions have already been adopted by San Miguel, San Juan, Hinsdale, Saguache, and Rio Grande Counties, and by the towns of Silverton, Creede, and Ophir. Resolutions are pending in several additional Colorado counties.

The resolutions are the result of efforts by the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition urging counties to formally declare themselves on the Fee Demo issue as a way of encouraging repeal of the federal program. Similar resolutions have been adopted in cities and counties nationwide, as well as by the state legislatures of California, Oregon, and New Hampshire. Although symbolic, the resolutions send a powerful message to Congress that Fee Demo is unpopular with the American people.

Recent hearings in the House, chaired by Colorado’s Scott McInnis, revealed plans to make the recreation fees, currently a test program, permanent. Originally a two-year demonstration, Fee Demo is now in its fifth year and was recently extended again, to September 2004. At the same time, the cap of 100 sites per agency was lifted, allowing federal agencies to charge fees for recreational access to any public land, whether in Colorado or anywhere else in the United States.

WSNFC President Robert Funkhouser expressed surprise at McInnis’s apparent support for permanent fees, since opposition to the demonstration program is widespread in his district. “Colorado now has more elected bodies on record against Fee Demo than any other state, and all of them are in McInnis’s Third District. It’s increasingly clear that the citizens of Colorado want him and our Senators to take the lead in fully funding public lands with existing tax dollars, not fees,” Funkhouser said.

At a WSNFC-sponsored protest on July 7th, 31 protesters were issued tickets for driving into the Yankee Boy Basin fee area near Ouray without displaying a pass on their vehicles. They are contesting the $25 fine on the grounds that a recreational pass is not required in order to exercise their First Amendment right to free speech. The case has been set for trial on January 23 before Judge Gudrun Rice in the Federal Magistrate Court in Grand Junction.

Encl.: Gunnison County Resolution 01-35