

## ***Introduces Willing Seller Act to allow land owners to sell land to government, help trail systems***

**(WASHINGTON, D.C.)** – U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman (R-Colorado) recently introduced legislation aimed at allowing willing land owners to sell their property to the government in order to aid the completion of nine different trail systems in the United States. The Willing Seller Act will help finish the Continental Divide Trail, which passes through Colorado, by allowing land owners to sell their land to the federal government if they own any parts of the trail.

“This is a common sense approach to completing our national trails,” Coffman said. “Land owners should have the right to sell to the government if they choose to.”

During the 1960’s and 1970’s, many studies authorized by Congress found the scenic importance of the Continental Divide Trail and the benefits to anyone involved in recreational activities.

A 1966 Bureau of Outdoor Recreation report, Trails for America, stated that, “consideration of a National Scenic Trail route along or near the Continental Divide of the Rocky Mountains would make available to recreationists a challenging stretch of country possessing awesome scenic grandeur, great aesthetic value, and significant historic interest.”

Between 1978 and 1986, Congress designated nine national scenic and national historic trails while prohibiting their managers from acquiring land with federal funds to protect the trail corridors and historic trail sites. Congressman Coffman’s Willing Seller Act will give the national scenic and historic trails, which do not have federal land acquisition authority, the ability to buy land from willing sellers.

The Willing Seller Act does not commit the government to buying any land but gives the government authority to buy land from any willing landowner. No land owner will be forced to sell land to the government under the legislation.

The legislation has gained support from Bruce Ward, founder of the Continental Divide Trail Alliance and Managing Director of Choose Outdoors, a national coalition of recreation interest. Ward stated, "I am extremely appreciative of Congressman Coffman's efforts to further outdoor recreation opportunities. This bill will help complete some of our nation's greatest national treasures. I look forward to working with the Congressman on this and other outdoor recreation issues."

Similar legislation has previously passed both the House of Representatives, in the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress, and the Senate in the 108<sup>th</sup>

Congress. The legislation did not become U.S. law because it did not pass in both chambers during the same session of Congress.

Coffman concluded, "This bill will help protect our nation's trails while respecting the individual property rights of the land owner."