

March 9, 2020

Read into the Record by Las Animas County Commissioner Luis Lopez

Re: SB 20-003 - Concerning Improvements to State Parks, and in Connection, Therewith, Making an Appropriation

Dear Chair Roberts, Bill Sponsors Representatives Esgar, Will and Committee Members.

My name is Luis Lopez and I am Chair of the Las Animas County Board of County Commissioners.

Trinidad Mayor Phil Rico is attending a three State meeting concerning the Southwest Chief/ Amtrak Passenger Rail that benefits Colorado's economy and provides transportation for persons living in Southern Colorado and other southwestern states. It will transport tourists to the new state park. He is unable to testify today and asked that I read his testimony into the record.

Both the City of Trinidad and the County Commissioners are in full support of SB 20-003.

The backdrop of the City of Trinidad is the iconic Fishers Peak and surrounding land that Governor Polis recently named as the 42nd State Park. It is located adjacent to the City of Trinidad whose citizens have long desired access to the privately held pristine property. As a lifelong resident, it has also been my dream. The following events occurred in the past three years to turn the dream into reality.

- In 2017, City officials and business leaders heard that the owner of the 19,200 acre ranch that includes Fishers Peak wanted to sell. When we heard this news, I asked City Council and received their support to work with other organizations to gather support for acquiring the property.
- Over the next two years, the City and local business leaders collaborated with the Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Lands, Great Outdoors Colorado and the Colorado Department of Natural Resources to obtain funding needed to acquire the property.

- In February of 2019, the Trust and Nature Conservancy completed the initial purchase and collaborated with GOCO and State Parks and Wildlife to finalize the required funding and details that resulted in the transfer of the property to Colorado Parks and Wildlife.
- Funds contained in SB 20-003 will allow Parks and Wildlife to pay for infrastructure projects required to facilitate the opening of a new state park surrounding Fishers Peak, as well as provide funds to upgrade facilities in current state parks due to the impact of increased visitation.

The opening of the park will provide Colorado citizens access to hiking, camping, mountain biking, hunting, educational and other outdoor recreational opportunities.

The opening of a new state park adjacent to Trinidad will result in increased visitation and significant economic benefits to the City and County from tourism. A study conducted by CU students estimated that the region could see an increase of 50,000 tourists with an estimated impact of \$3.8 million to the local economy.

Trinidad State Junior College may be initiating a trail building educational program that would be the first in the nation. The citizens, businesses and community leaders of Trinidad strongly support this request. Please see the letters of support that have been distributed to Committee members.

There is wide support from the citizens of Trinidad and Las Animas County for the new state park and we request your support of SB 20-003.

Mayor Phil Rico