

**Testimony in support of
H.R. 4644, the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act**

**Submitted by Colin Davis before the
House Subcommittee on Energy and Minerals
House Committee on Natural Resources
June 21st, 2018**

Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Lowenthal, and members of the subcommittee:

Good afternoon, my name is Colin Davis. I want to thank the chairman and ranking member for holding this hearing today and for the opportunity to testify before you in support of H.R. 4644. I also want to thank Congressman Gianforte listening to his constituents, for his support and his commitment to protect our local economy, jobs and way of life in Montana.

My wife, two daughters and I own and operate the historic Chico Hot Springs Resort in Emigrant, Montana. Our business is located just north of Yellowstone National Park. We employ over 180 people and last year welcomed over 80,000 guests to our resort, many of whom pass through on their way to visit Yellowstone National Park.

As a major employer in our region, I am here representing the Yellowstone Gateway Business Coalition. The Yellowstone Gateway Business Coalition is made up of over regional 400 businesses and landowners from every walk of life, every political viewpoint, and every vocation imaginable. While we don't agree on everything, we do all agree that Yellowstone is more valuable than gold—and that is the threat we're here today to discuss and hopefully, resolve.

Our home, Montana's Paradise Valley, is the front doorstep to Yellowstone and only year-round entrance to the park's northern entrance. The valley is called Paradise for good reasons. It's bordered on all sides by mountain peaks and public lands, its bottom lands are checkered with rolling hills, cottonwood glades, private lands and wide-open spaces created by ranches and farms. Flowing through the heart of our valley is the world-renowned Yellowstone River and we are its stewards.

God doesn't make places like the Paradise Valley anymore, it truly is the Last Best Place. It is one of the top destinations in the West to spend an afternoon floating the river, casting a fly line. It is also one of the best places to spend a frozen November morning teaching your children how to hunt for deer and elk. I've done it religiously with both of my daughters. Not by any stretch of the imagination is Paradise Valley an appropriate location for large-scale open pit gold mines. That's why I stand before you today to promote the passage of H.R. 4644.

Our business community has scrambled to respond to two proposed gold mines. One of these gold mines, in Emigrant Gulch, is proposed just miles from my own business. My wife and I fear, if fully developed, such a mine would irrefutably harm the character of our valley, hurt our business model, and the business models of our neighbors...the effect on the viewshed and the

economy would be catastrophic. The other mine at Crevice Mountain, is literally on the border of and overlooking Yellowstone National Park, and when developed could be within sight of the historic Roosevelt Arch.

The fundamental theme that has united so many members of the local business community is that our jobs and way of life just don't run on gold mines. They run on Yellowstone, access to public lands for recreation, and the Yellowstone River watershed. For example:

- According to a University of Montana economic study, Park County, which encompasses the Paradise Valley, benefitted from an estimated \$196 million in non-resident tourism revenues in 2014 alone, representing almost 3,000 jobs.
- Park County ranks number one in non-resident traveler expenditures among the major destination counties in Montana.
- Visitation to Yellowstone only continues to grow, and last month Yellowstone set another record with almost 44,700 visits in May, which is up 6 percent compared to May of last year.
- Meanwhile the Yellowstone River is a powerful economic industry and fuels over \$70 million a year in direct expenditures from fishing alone.
- The Montana Bed Tax in Park County. Generated \$1.7 million in tax revenue to the state and local tourism in 2017. Some of this funding goes to public access.

It's not just about the power of tourism dollars. Entrepreneurs from other areas of the county are choosing our region to locate due to the abundance of public lands, quality of life and proximity to Yellowstone National Park. We fear, large scale, highly visible gold mines could put our economic advantage at risk and lead to long-term economic impairment and stagnation for our region's growing economy.

To fight this invasion into our lives, our business coalition united behind three simple principles:

- Number one, we are pro-business. But these specific mines are bad for business. If we were to allow full scale development, these gold mines would infringe on the economic prosperity and efforts of thousands of local Montanans.
- Number two, we are not an anti-mining group which is why our membership includes miners. Simply put, the front doorstep to Yellowstone isn't the correct place for that activity.
- Number three, we respect the sanctity of private property rights and any solution will not infringe on those rights. BUT, the risks of hard-rock mining on public lands need to be balanced with rights of business and private land owners who would incur the long-term costs of any mining impacts to this prized watershed.

Guided by these principles, our business coalition has worked very hard and gradually we have begun to make headway. In late 2016, Chico Hot Springs hosted former Department of the Interior Secretary Sally Jewell when she announced a two-year time-out on new mining claims on 30,000 acres of public lands adjacent to the mining proposals. The time-out is intended to

provide the agency enough time to evaluate whether to withdraw these public lands for a maximum of twenty years, the longest possible mineral withdrawal according to the law.

The Trump administration has remained supportive of the administrative withdrawal, which has been spearheaded by current Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke. Secretary Zinke is currently working with the Forest Service to free up resources to ensure their environmental review is completed and the full twenty-year withdrawal is in place before November of this year.

While we commend the work of our federal agencies and Secretary Zinke, we don't want future generations to be dealing with this same issue all over again when the presumed administrative withdrawal expires. That's why we have asked Montana's congressional delegation to make the administrative withdrawal permanent through an Act of Congress, which is the legislation before you today.

I would like to re-emphasize the intent and scope of the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act. H.R. 4644 is simply an insurance policy for our economic future. This legislation was generated at the local level through community discussions with our local elected officials, state elected officials, and Congressional delegation, and compliments the ongoing work of the U.S. Forest Service and Department of Interior.

Our community wanted this legislation to do just what it needs to do and not a single thing more. As written, H.R. 4644, and its companion legislation in the Senate, only deals with industrial mining in Paradise Valley and only on public lands. It simply eliminates the ability for the proposed mines to expand operations onto unclaimed public lands. This legislation will in no way jeopardize any private property rights. This legislation will in no way jeopardize any other existing or future uses on our National Forest lands. It's simple legislation from the bottom-up that will protect our local jobs and way of life.

Because of this, H.R. 4466 and its companion bill in the Senate enjoy robust bipartisan support. That includes support from our local Park County Commission, Montana state legislators on both sides of the aisle, the Gardiner Chamber of Commerce, all the major employers in the region, and hundreds of additional landowners and mom and pop businesses in Yellowstone's northern gateway. We are also fortunate to have the support of Montana's entire congressional delegation for the protection of this region.

We've worked long and hard to get our community legislation before Congress today and it is our hope that you will give the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act your favorable consideration.

In closing, I wanted to emphasize that for me this has never been an environmental issue or a political issue. This is a community issue and a business issue. We are a group of ordinary business owners, from every political representation who are just trying to protect our own backyard. One that we share with all Americans. We hope that Congress can show the same level of bipartisan unity that our local community has shown in dealing with the gold mines' threats to our jobs, the local economy, our way of life and the future of our children.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.