

National monument?

J.D. Thomas, Mail Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, December 8, 2014 9:00 am

Most of the approximately 50 people who spoke during the public comment portion of a Browns Canyon meeting Saturday at Salida SteamPlant voiced their support of designating the area a national monument, either through Congress or by executive order.

An estimated 500 people turned out for the meeting, at which locals and out-of-towners gave their opinions to Sens. Mark Udall and Michael Bennet, U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell, Bureau of Land Management Deputy Director Steve Ellis and Colorado Department of Natural Resources Deputy Director Bob Randall.

A lottery, with numbers pulled out of a bucket, determined who was able to speak in addition to 10 stakeholders.

Amy Wright with Environmental Learning for Kids in Denver said “urban youth” rarely get to experience nature, and her organization often takes youth from Denver to Browns Canyon on nature expeditions. She said Environmental Learning for Kids supports Browns Canyon being named a national monument.

Scott Peterson, Chaffee County Visitors Bureau marketing director, said the bureau supports the national monument designation because travel is a powerful economic engine for Chaffee County, and tourism represents a quick path toward economic prosperity.

“With the designation of Browns Canyon National Monument, Chaffee County will create a unique mark on the Colorado map. This will preserve this unique ecosystem and beautiful landscape for future generations,” he said.

“This designation of Browns Canyon as a national monument will bring many new visitors to this beautiful part of Colorado, who will spend millions of dollars in our area, increasing sales tax and lodging tax while creating hundreds of jobs in tourism.”

Gary Reppenhagen, Denver, said Browns Canyon is a place where veterans can go to alleviate the effects of war, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. He said the proximity to Fort Carson, Peterson Air Force Base and the Air Force Academy makes it an ideal place for veterans to go that is away from the



Public meeting about Browns Canyon

From left, Sen. Michael Bennet, U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell and Sen. Mark Udall speak during a public meeting about Browns Canyon Saturday at Salida SteamPlant. During public comment, approximately 50 people voiced their support of Browns Canyon being designated a national monument, and a small number of people spoke against the idea.

distractions that come with living in a populated area.

The former U.S. Army soldier said he supported Browns Canyon being designated as a national monument.

Brink Messick, Salida, also spoke in support of the national monument. He said the fields and woods where he lived in North Carolina are now developed, which is why he wants the area to be preserved. “The last 10 years I’ve been involved in nonprofits that promote youth taking part in outdoor activities,” he said.

Matt Trujillo, New Mexico, said he supports President Barack Obama signing an executive order to designate the national monument through the Antiquities Act. He said the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument is a perfect example of preserving landscapes and protecting grazing land for ranchers.

Members of the Hispanic Access Foundation of Denver, some of whom took a bus to the meeting, attended to show support for the national monument designation. At least one bus was used to transport people to the meeting from out of the area.

Keith Baker, president of Friends of Browns Canyon, said he did notice that some people came from out of town, but the vast majority of those in the crowd were local.

“I didn’t notice any buses personally,” he said. “I do know there were a few 12-passenger vans that brought people, but they have every right to be there. It’s public land.”

A small number of speakers opposed national monument designation. Terry Peavler, Buena Vista, said “old time” locals feel the federal government has brushed them aside. He said older people still enjoy getting outdoors but aren’t able to use old motorized-vehicle paths to hunt and fish.

Peavler said if they closed the motorized vehicle paths because a small number of people destroyed nature, highways should also be shut down because people drive dangerously.

Cory Scheffel, Salida, suggested people take a “step back and slow down” when it comes to Browns Canyon. “Maybe we should just think about it,” he said.

Tim Canterbury read a statement from Upper Arkansas Water Conservatory District Manager Terry Scanga. Scanga wrote that he was concerned about the protection of water rights on the river if Browns Canyon becomes a national monument through an executive order because no legislative process would state the water rights should remain untouched.

Chaffee County resident Paul Jensen told Udall that the county didn’t vote for him, nor did the rest of the state. He said Udall’s Browns Canyon legislation was one of the reasons the county did not vote for him.

Colorado 5th Congressional District Rep. Doug Lamborn was not able to attend the meeting, but he released a statement read by staff member Neal Schuerer, which was met by “boos.”

In the statement Lamborn said he supports a bill going through Congress, having an opportunity for both sides to be heard, rather than a presidential executive order. He also said there is no consensus among

Chaffee County voters when it comes to Browns Canyon.

State Sen. Gail Schwartz (D-Snowmass) also attended and gave a statement in support of national monument designation.

Following public comments Udall said he was “heartened” by the turnout, which filled the SteamPlant theater and overflowed with listeners in the ballroom. He said talks have been going on for 20 years to preserve Browns Canyon, and he believes this is an opportunity to make that happen.

He said every president but one since the passing of the Antiquities Act of 1906 has used the act to create national monuments. “It’s one of the tools that can be used to accomplish the goal,” he said.

Udall said the concerns expressed are legitimate and will be addressed because he and Bennet have suggested the framework of their legislation be used in the executive order to protect grazing and water rights in Browns Canyon.