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San Juan Citizens Alliance Applauds Senate Passage of the Hermosa Creek Watershed Protection Act

Durango, CO – December 12, 2014 – San Juan Citizens Alliance (SJCA) applauds today's passage by the Senate of the Hermosa Creek Watershed Protection Act (SB 841). The Act, along with other public lands bills, was attached to the Defense Authorization Act which passed on a 89 to 11 vote. President Obama is expected to sign the measure into law soon.

Today's vote by the Senate, coming one month after the House of Representative's approval of the Act, represents the Act's final legislative hurdle and is the culmination of many years of work by local residents committed to ensuring long term protection for the Hermosa Creek watershed. The Act will protect the watershed along with current uses through the combination of a 70,000 acre Special Management Area and the 38,000 acre Hermosa Creek Wilderness Area.

The concept for this legislation was spawned by the River Protection Workgroup's Hermosa Creek committee during its multi-year effort to review whether the watershed had adequate protections for the values and resources honored by the community. The committee decided additional protections were desirable and anointed a subgroup to draft legislation to secure such protections.

Senator Bennet's staff was instrumental in aiding the group in writing the draft legislation and the Senator, enthused that the "bill grew from the grassroots up", became the Senate sponsor of the bill. Senator Mark Udall, an avid proponent of conserving public lands in Colorado, joined as a co-sponsor. Congressman Tipton, after thoroughly vetting the process under which the legislation was created, joined the effort as the House sponsor which gave the legislation the additional boost of having bipartisan and bicameral support.

The Hermosa Creek Watershed Protection Act also includes important components to protect values and resources on other public lands adjacent or near to the city of Durango, including mineral withdrawals for areas such as Perins Peak, Animas City Mountain, Horse Gulch and the Lake Nighthorse. These lands are especially valued for their undeveloped scenic vistas and recreational opportunities as well as for wildlife habitat.

Former Durango Mayor Michael Rendon, a key community leader who supported the additional protective measures, stated, "These mineral withdrawals will protect our surrounding lands that are highly valued by Durango residents and will give us the

assurance that in the future we can hike, bike, view or otherwise enjoy these lands knowing that a pumpjack or compressor plant will never be just around the corner."

Other elements of the legislation include the transfer of 82 acres of Bureau of Land Management land in the Grandview area to La Plata County and the establishment of the Molas Pass Recreation Area on BLM lands. This Recreation Area will allow the continuation of snowmobile and dog mushing activities on more than 400 acres surrounding Molas Lake, an important economic driver for San Juan County in the winter.

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ABOUT SAN JUAN CITIZENS ALLIANCE

San Juan Citizens Alliance is a 501(c)3 environmental advocacy organization based in Durango, CO. The Alliance works to protect clean air, pure water, and healthy lands – the foundations of resilient communities, ecosystems, and economics throughout the San Juan Basin. <http://sanjuancitizens.org>

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