

Rocky Flats Coalition of Local Governments

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Op-Ed Article

Coalition Supports Rocky Flats Cleanup and Wildlife Refuge Bill

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The story of Rocky Flats and the surrounding area is deeply rooted in the history of our communities and in the psyche of many of our citizens. It's a story of homesteaders and bombs, of a unique natural environment and a challenging relationship with the Atomic Energy Commission.

Now fifty years after the headlines extolled the coming of the nuclear age to our communities, we are faced with the opportunity of turning this once top-secret nuclear facility into an asset for this region. With the strong support of Colorado's congressional delegation, lead by Senator Wayne Allard and Representative Mark Udall, we have the opportunity to clean up Rocky Flats and to protect its precious natural resources.

Sen. Allard and Rep. Udall have introduced a bill in Congress to enact this change, to protect Rocky Flats for future generations, free from the encroaching development that has both shaped and reflected our robust economy. "The Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge Bill of 2001" would designate Rocky Flats as a national wildlife refuge once the cleanup and closure of Rocky Flats is complete.

As the Board of Directors of the Rocky Flats Coalition of Local Governments, a coalition of elected officials from Boulder County and Jefferson County, the cities of Arvada, Boulder, Broomfield, Westminster, and the Town of Superior, we unanimously applaud this legislation and call on Congress to support and secure its early passage.

The bill would accomplish a number of the Coalition's key cleanup and future use goals. Most importantly, it would protect the land for future generations by mandating the site be managed as a national wildlife refuge, while ensuring that the cleanup protects human health and the environment. Additionally, this designation would prohibit future development of Rocky Flats and annexation of the property by any local government.

The legislation would also require on-going federal ownership of the site, an integral component of a comprehensive long-term site stewardship program, and also ensure that cleanup is completed prior to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service assuming management of Rocky Flats. Finally, the bill would mandate the involvement of the Coalition and others in developing the refuge management plan.

Not unexpectedly, the bill does have a minority of detractors. Some have suggested that the bill will lead to a "dirty" cleanup for it does not specify cleanup to a level that would allow for residential use. They claim the bill will diminish or compromise the cleanup efforts. We disagree with such claims.

A careful reading of the bill clearly suggests otherwise, for it explicitly states that cleanup must protect human health and the environment. Moreover, due to its widespread support, the prospect of the bill becoming law is helping to drive a more protective cleanup — far greater than the cleanup agreed to in 1996 by the Department of Energy, the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment, and the Environmental Protection Agency. The Coalition, for its part, continues to work with Sen. Allard, Rep. Udall and these agencies to assure that the cleanup protects human health and the environment.

This legislation, if enacted, will chart a new course for Rocky Flats, one that few imagined just a few years ago. As Sen. Allard and Rep. Udall have often stated, the legislation will turn weapons into wildlife.

The Coalition applauds Sen. Allard and Rep. Udall's commitment and leadership in cleaning up and protecting Rocky Flats for future generations. We also applaud Governor Owens, Attorney General Salazar, and the entire Colorado congressional delegation for their support of this important legislation.

Together, we can clean up Rocky Flats and protect the resource, not just for ourselves but for our grandchildren and their grandchildren as well.