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## **‘OTR’ receives support from Hickenlooper, parks board**

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As supporters and opposers of Christo and the late Jeanne-Claude’s “Over The River” project continue to wait for a preferred alternative from the Bureau of Land Management, the temporary art project continues to gain support from officials from across the state.

Last month, Gov. John Hickenlooper expressed his “unequivocal support for this unique project” and the Colorado State Parks Board unanimously approved an agreement to allow OTR to be exhibited on selected areas managed by State Parks within the Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area.

In Hickenlooper’s letter to Bureau of Land Management State Director Helen Hankins, he wrote, “We have been reassured by Christo that concerns that have been raised about potential impacts to local communities, wildlife, users of Highway 50 and to other resources will be addressed.”

Hickenlooper said in the letter he appreciates the commitment and believes the project will be of a significant net benefit to Colorado and Coloradans.

Hickenlooper also mentioned the potential economic and tourism benefits of the project, and wrote that OTR will bring revenue to the state “in the form of construction jobs filled by local residents, increased tourism spending at local business and the generation of additional local and state tax revenues...without expense to the taxpayer.”

The Colorado State Parks Board’s decision on June 24 is subject to the BLM’s final approval of the project.

“In taking action today, the board believes that the benefits of the Over The River project, not only to the state park system but to all of Colorado, will enhance our ability to serve the needs of all residents and encourage outdoor recreation,” said Gary Butterworth, chair of the Parks Board, in a statement.

Butterworth said in the statement that in any project the size of OTR, there will be benefits, as well as potential adverse impacts to a project the size of OTR.

“This board takes its responsibilities seriously and is deliberative in its decision-making process,” he said. “Each member, in his or her own way, invests a great deal of time considering the views of the public, the staff, anglers, river outfitters and other key stakeholders who could be impacted by this project.”

He said the board believes that the benefits of OTR, not only to the state park system but to all of Colorado, will enhance the CSP’s ability to serve the needs of all residents and encourage outdoor recreation.

The AHRA is managed through a cooperative effort between Colorado State Parks and the BLM.

Formed in 1989, this partnership allows agencies to provide visitors with recreation opportunities and care for significant natural resources of the Upper Arkansas River Valley. “For those who may be adversely impacted, we have a record of continuing to partner and listen to constituents, and working to address those concerns,” Butterworth said.

The BLM continues to refine its analysis before announcing the OTR Preferred Alternative, which was scheduled to be released this spring, even as early as February.

The project’s plans call for 5.9 miles of silvery, luminous fabric panels to be suspended high above the Arkansas River along a 42-mile stretch of the river between Salida and Cañon City and exhibited for two consecutive weeks in August 2014.