



Dolores County Commissioners
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NCA Letter - Dolores County

August 17, 2020

The Honorable Michael Bennet
261 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Bennet:

We are writing to you about the locally developed National Conservation Area proposal for a portion of the Dolores River Canyon below McPhee Reservoir. The proposal spans the entire west end of our county along the Dolores River. Dolores County strongly supports this proposal, and we ask that you take the lead in moving the proposal forward by introducing legislation.

This proposal is the result of a decade's worth of dialogue and compromise by a diverse group of stakeholders including water users, agricultural interests, local governments, OHV users, conservation groups, and recreationists. The NCA proposal we have crafted has benefits for all these interests.

Several key issues have raised concerns in local communities about future management of the Dolores River below McPhee Reservoir. The "suitability" finding under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is one concern due to the federal reserved water right that would come with a designation. Additionally, populations of three native fish species that exist in the river have declined throughout the Colorado River Basin and there is a potential that they could be listed under the Endangered Species Act. We feel that there is a lot of uncertainty regarding management on the Dolores River below McPhee because of existing or potential federal actions. The NCA proposal in large part addresses these uncertainties.

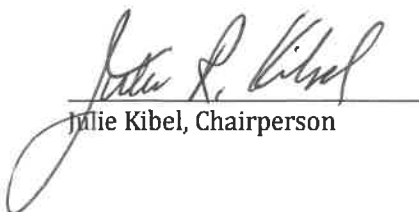
We believe the proposal will protect the river corridor and benefit the fish populations while respecting private water rights and McPhee Project contract obligations. This is of great importance to our agriculture-based communities. The proposal also protects private property rights.

After years of working together cooperatively, we and our partners believe that the time is right to introduce legislation reflecting the NCA proposal that this diverse group has put together. It will benefit the river, the fish, water users, and our agricultural heritage. The lands affected are in Dolores and San Miguel Counties. We are working closely with San Miguel County to advance the proposal.

We respectfully ask you to introduce NCA legislation this year.

Sincerely,

The Dolores County Board of County Commissioners


Julie Kibel, Chairperson


Steve Garchar


Floyd Cook