



MICHAEL BENNET
U.S. SENATOR *for* COLORADO

Local Government Support for the GORP Act

1. Gunnison County
2. Delta County
3. Pitkin County
4. Hinsdale County
5. Saguache County
6. Ouray County
7. Town of Crested Butte
8. Town of Mt. Crested Butte
9. City of Gunnison
10. Town of Paonia
11. Town of Ridgway



Gunnison County Board of County Commissioners

Phone: (970) 641-0248 • Fax: (970) 641-3061

Email: bocc@gunnisoncounty.org • www.GunnisonCounty.org

August 4, 2020

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

Dear Senator Bennet:

We are writing to you regarding the multi-year effort by the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative (GPLI) to reach balanced agreements and make recommendations on how best to manage key wildland areas in Gunnison County. After years of discussion and compromise, the proposal has received broad community support, and we respectfully request that your office craft legislation based on the group's recommendations.

In the summer of 2012, you came to Gunnison County to meet with citizens, advocacy groups, and local officials on the banks of the Slate River to discuss the future of our treasured public lands. You said at the time that if the community were to bring to you a well-vetted proposal based on dialogue and collaboration among numerous interests in the county, that you would consider introducing legislation based on that in the Senate.

Subsequent to that meeting, several groups put forth plans for the public lands in Gunnison County, and in response to those and with the goal of developing a community consensus, Gunnison County Commissioners convened a working group, consisting of motorized, mechanized, and quiet recreation interests, ranchers, conservation groups, water interests, and wildlife advocates. The group utilized a professional facilitator, and agreed to operate based on respect for all views, open dialogue, and compromise. The GPLI held numerous meetings between February 2016 and June 2017 before releasing a report to the public with an initial set of recommendations. The group then convened several public forums to present the report and gather feedback from citizens and interest groups – that input was considered by the working group, and much was incorporated into a revised plan, released in January 2019.

Throughout this process, Gunnison County participated in the discussions and provided needed information and community-wide perspective. The County did not take positions on individual areas, rather served as conveners and supporters of transparent, equitable, and productive dialogue.

The GPLI's current proposal recommends the designation of three new wilderness areas and wilderness additions totaling 83,984 acres, and 23 special management Areas (SMAs) totaling 368,237 acres across the County. The working group believes this represents an appropriate balance to the protection and management of the natural, biological, recreational, scientific, agricultural and other values these lands offer in abundance. Several areas near the County boundaries remain under discussion, though the GPLI plans to resolve those in the near future. The County Commission believes that the proposal is ready for

further action, and officially endorsed the recommendations in our July 29, 2019, comment on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest Working Draft of Revised Land Management Plan.

Based on our ongoing support of the GPLI process and recommendations, Gunnison County believes it is time to move to the legislative phase, and now requests that your office begin drafting a bill reflecting the balanced approach and broad community support for the GPLI proposal. We recognize the ongoing challenges that exist related to the COVID-19 pandemic, but we believe that the protection of our public lands will be crucial to the well-being of our community and our economic recovery in the months and years ahead. We stand ready to assist in any way as this process continues, and we look forward to continued partnership and dialogue.

Respectfully,



Jonathan Houck
Chairperson



Roland Mason
Vice-Chairperson



Elizabeth Smith
Commission

April 9, 2024

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

The Honorable John Hickenlooper
375 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lauren Boebert
1713 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-0603

Dear Senator Bennet, Senator Hickenlooper and Representative Boebert:

Delta County Board of Commissioners appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection Act (GORP) and we have been involved with Gunnison County on this proposed legislation for a number of years. Delta County appreciates the extensive public process that Gunnison County and Senator Bennet have taken to address specific concerns and landscape management. Delta County formally supports the Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection Act (GORP) now with the following amendments:

1. Withdrawal for the Federal lands in the North Fork Valley as shown in Exhibit A from the mineral leasing laws with respect to oil and gas. The point of consensus does not impact private land, private minerals, or valid existing rights, and it would not preclude the maintenance of rights-of-way and other infrastructure.
2. Removal of the proposed Black Mesa Special Management Area from the draft GORP legislation.
3. Modification of the Lamborn Wilderness Area boundary to allow for the Paonia Winter Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project's critical wildlife habitat vegetation treatments.

4. The addition to the proposed GORP legislation of a new section providing that existing motorized use on the Gunnison River within the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness Area may continue as established before the designation of the Wilderness.

Delta County understands that this legislation will also include a designation of No Surface Occupancy as depicted in Exhibit A. Development of valid existing rights will be allowed to progress under the lease requirements as administered within federal, state, and local regulations. The protections of water resources, air quality, visual resources, and related traffic issues must and would be addressed by thorough site-specific reviews and resulting conditions of approvals.

Specific to Colorado Outdoor and Recreation Act (CORE) Act details a Greater Thompson Divide Fugitive Coal Mine Methane Use Pilot Program (section 305 and 306) that would allow for the establishment of a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) pilot program that would provide for the leasing of fugitive methane emissions and allow for the capping or destruction of fugitive methane emissions. The Fugitive Methane Emission Leasing Program would be subject to valid existing rights and will encourage the capture of fugitive methane emissions for beneficial use, such as generating electrical power, producing useable heat, transporting the methane to market, transforming the fugitive methane emissions into a different marketable material; or if the beneficial use of the fugitive methane emissions is not feasible, the destruction of the fugitive methane emissions by flaring. Additionally, Section 305 and 306 would provide the regulatory framework to BLM to allow for the methane to be leased under a valid existing Federal coal lease. This certainty and direction would allow for existing methane to be flared and electricity projects to expand and continue to offer viable solutions. Delta County is in support of these particular sections of the CORE Act.

The proposed map and letter are the first steps in a lengthy process and Delta County will be at the table during the drafting, editing, amending and final process. Any attempt to modify language or maps without the involvement of Delta County will require the Board of County Commissioners withdrawing their support of the proposed legislation. Delta County looks forward to working with all stakeholders during the legislative and regulatory process.

Sincerely,
Delta Board of County Commissioners


Mike Lane, Chairman


Wendell A. Koontz, Vice Chairman


Don Suppes, Commissioner



September 10, 2024

The Honorable Michael Bennet
261 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Bennet:

Pitkin County is pleased to support the Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection (“GORP”) Act, including the proposed designations of the portion of the proposed Star Peak Wilderness and the Ashcroft Addition to the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness that lie within Pitkin County. Those areas include sensitive ecological values, incredible scenery, and outstanding opportunities for hiking, backpacking, cross-country skiing and other quiet recreation.

The Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness is one of Colorado’s most visited wilderness areas. By expanding it with lands near Ashcroft and Star Peak, as well as conserving additional national forest lands contiguous to and adjacent to it, the GORP Act will help protect a landscape complex in and around the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness that will significantly benefit wildlife, climate adaptation, recreation, scientific research, and local economies for generations to come.

We also appreciate the strong collaboration among local stakeholders and broad community input that is reflected in the bill, including within Pitkin County. We look forward to supporting you as you advance the GORP Act through Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "G. Poschman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Greg Poschman, Chair
Pitkin County Board of Commissioners



311 N. Henson St. Lake City, Colorado 81235 970-944-2225 www.hinsdalecountycolorado.us

July 5, 2023

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

Dear Senator Bennet:

The Hinsdale County Board of County Commissioners would like to thank you for considering our comments on the discussion draft of the Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection (GORP) Act. We appreciate your coordination with Hinsdale County on the portion of the proposed GORP Act along the Gunnison and Hinsdale County line. We write to express our support for the GORP Act, including the public lands in Hinsdale County proposed to be added to the Uncompahgre Wilderness.

The stated goal of the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative (GPLI) is to protect local public lands, enhance a strong and sustainable economy, and support historic uses of public lands in Gunnison County. The GPLI stakeholders represent ranching, water resources, summer motorized use, winter motorized use, conservation, mountain biking, hunting, and angling. We commend the member organizations of the GPLI for their longstanding efforts to reach consensus on federal legislative public lands designations across Gunnison County that resulted in the proposed GORP Act.

The lands that are part of the proposed Uncompahgre Wilderness Additions under the draft GORP Act are important to Hinsdale County, and they support Hinsdale County's economy in myriad ways. A local grazing permittee – Western States Ranches, the Town of Ridgway and Ouray County, and various public lands recreation user groups involved with GPLI all support designation of these areas. Some of us have visited these areas and can attest to their important scenic, cultural, watershed, and recreation resources.

The proposed addition to the Uncompahgre Wilderness in between the West and Middle Forks of the Cimarron River, and specifically the portion in Hinsdale County, provides important wildlife habitat for several species. This includes summer range for elk, priority habitat and concentration areas for moose, mule deer summer range, bighorn sheep summer range, and overall range for black bears. These areas are upper tier Colorado roadless areas and possess wilderness character that warrants their permanent protection.

Protected public lands like the Red Cloud Peak and Handies Peak Wilderness Study Areas, the Uncompahgre Wilderness, and the Powderhorn Wilderness define the quality of life for our county's residents and provide the setting for world-class outdoor recreation experiences for visitors from across Colorado, the U.S. and the world. We believe the proposed addition to the Uncompahgre Wilderness in Hinsdale County should be included in the GORP Act and introduced in Congress.

Sincerely,

Greg Levine
County Commissioner, Chair

Robert Hurd
County Commissioner

Kristine Borchers
County Commissioner



SAGUACHE COUNTY GOVERNMENT

505 Third Street • P. O. Box 326

Saguache, Colorado 81149

Phone: (719) 655-2321 • Fax: (719) 655-2321

May 16, 2023

Honorable Michael Bennet
261 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC

Re: Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection Act

Dear Senator Bennet.

The Saguache County Board of County Commissioners (Commission) is aware of your office's sponsorship of the Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection Act, or GORP. We understand that the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative (GPLI), is a community-based stakeholders group with representative from 10 organizations representing ranching, water resources, motorized recreation, conservation, mountain biking, and hunting and angling, that has broadly engaged local governments, the public, and a wide range of other stakeholders in their efforts, including the governments, the public, and a wide range of other stakeholders in their efforts, including the Commission. As a result of that outreach, we have considered the proposal to designate some federal public lands around the Gunnison—Saguache County line to protect key wildlife habitat. See map attached.

We write to you today to ask you to include these federal public lands located in northwest Saguache County as part of a Wildlife Conservation Area that protects valid existing rights and other established uses in your proposed Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection Act. Such an area should be designed to improve habitat management for big game, Gunnison Sage Grouse, and other wildlife, along with the important scenic, cultural, watershed, and recreation resources – including hunting and fishing – on those public lands, in the spirit of multiple use.

The Commission recognizes the importance of wildlife to our county and constituents. Recently, the Commission adopted a resolution in support of wildlife corridors (Resolution 2021-GR-09.) There is significant wildlife and big game habitat, including important migration corridors, that cross Saguache County and connect with Gunnison County, including areas proposed for designation under the GORP. Including this connected landscape in the legislation would provide protections for important wildlife habitat, would support Saguache County's ecosystems, and its nearly \$7 million hunting economy while also respecting existing uses on the public lands.


The Commission wishes to ensure that the Wildlife Conservation Area designation protects existing grazing permits, and the transfer of existing rights in the same manner as was the case prior to the special designation. Active management of grazing must continue on designated lands. The Commission wishes to ensure that Best Management Practices will be used to maintain the productivity of these lands for future generations of humans and wildlife, including, but not limited to, the effective management of wildlife populations.

Agricultural operations, including public lands grazing, have long been a mainstay of our local economy and are important to our way of life. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Saguache County produced \$105 million worth of agricultural products in 2017, including \$58.5 million of vegetables and potatoes, \$20.3 million of other crops and hay; and \$15 million of livestock, poultry and other products. These agricultural resources are dependent upon sustainable management of public land that protects watersheds, wetlands, riparian zones, and rangelands.

In accordance with the principles outlined above, the Commission supports the designation of a Sawtooth Wildlife Conservation Area in northwestern Saguache County and into Gunnison County. Healthy, functioning ecosystems and wildlife corridors will promote a sustainable balance between humans and the natural landscape. By recognizing the outstanding wildlife resources of the area, along with the associated recreational opportunities and existing uses, this designation would serve the residents of Saguache and Gunnison Counties well. We look forward to working with you and your office on the details of this proposal as the GORP progresses.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

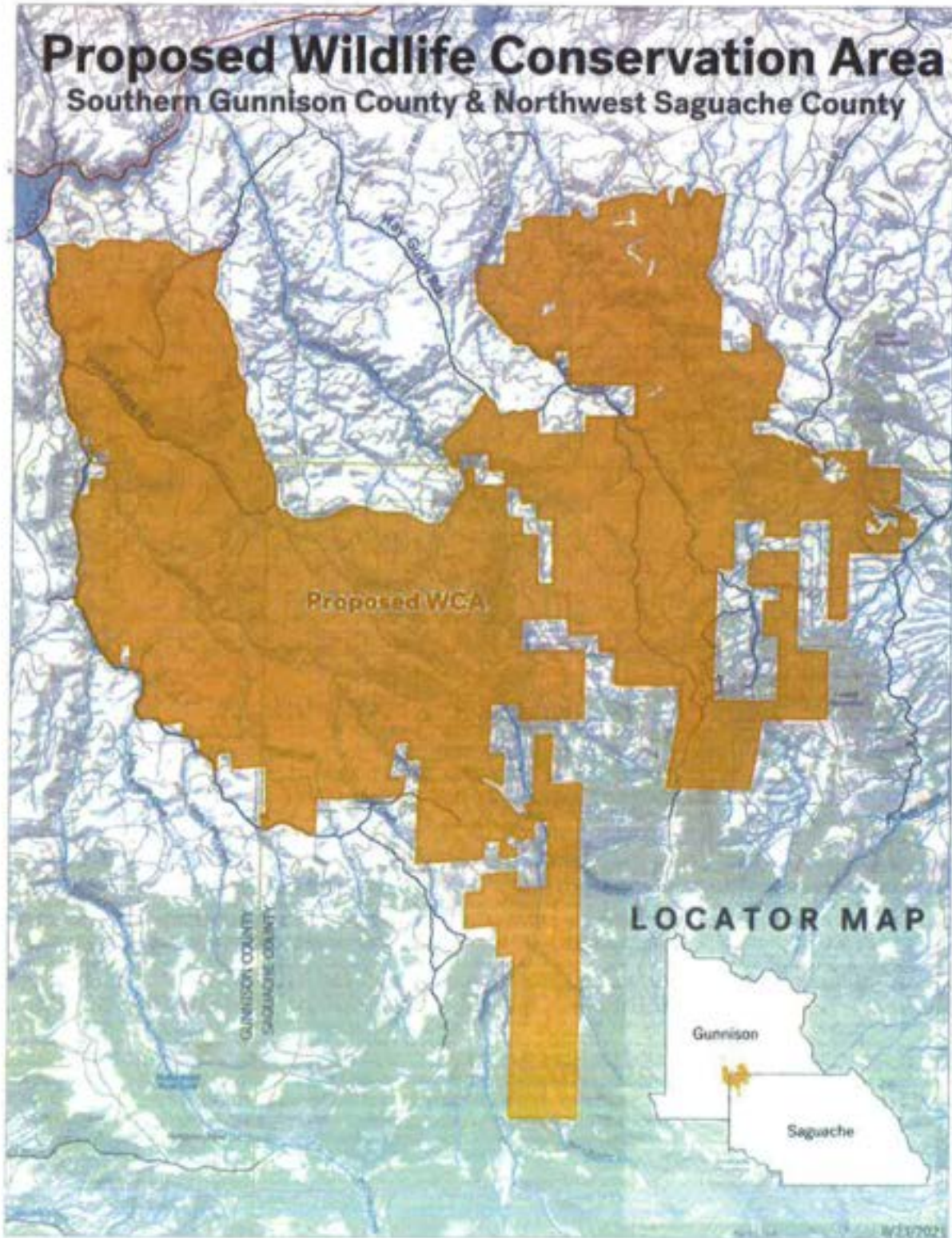
Sincerely,



Tom McCracken, Chairman



DRAFT





MICHELLE NAUER
LYNN M. PADGETT
JAKE NIECE

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

P.O. Box C • Ouray, Colorado 81427 • 970-325-7320 • FAX: 970-325-0452

September 10, 2024

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

Dear Senator Bennet:

Ouray County Board of County Commissioners wants to express our strong support for the **Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection (GORP) Act** which began as our neighboring county's Gunnison Public Lands Initiative (GPLI). Similar to the development of the CORE Act and the preceding San Juan Wilderness Act, the GORP Act has been developed through a transparent and collaborative community-driven process engaging diverse stakeholders for over ten years. We appreciate the time and interest you and your staff dedicated to understanding and participating in the GPLI process and the time dedicated to perfecting the GORP Act.

Ouray County residents and visitors are very familiar with the Cimarron range and frequent the trails and public lands within the three major forks of the Cimarron watershed. Gunnison, Ouray, and Hinsdale Counties share the Uncompahgre Wilderness. With this letter, Ouray County is registering our strong support of the GORP Act, especially the proposed additions to the Uncompahgre Wilderness: Turret Ridge, Little Cimarron, and Failes Creek/Soldier Creek. Together, these proposed additions are referred to in the GORP Act as "Certain Federal land in the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests comprising approximately 13,948 acres, as generally depicted as 'Uncompahgre Wilderness Additions' on the map entitled 'Sheet 10: Uncompahgre Additions' and dated August 27, 2024. The GORP Act would protect unique geology and high quality ecosystems that contribute to the spectacular scenery viewed from within the existing wilderness and surrounding trails, ridges, and valleys in all three counties. Some of the proposed wilderness addition lands can be viewed from Ouray County's scenic Highway 550 corridor north of Ridgway. Their ruggedness and lack of trails ensure solitude for visitors, and they provide important migration areas for elk moving between the higher San Juan Mountains to wintering grounds near Blue Mesa Reservoir, as well as a habitat for wildlife, including lynx and moose.

While the proposed additions to the Uncompahgre Wilderness lie primarily in Gunnison County, we believe most visitors to the Cimarrons and the Uncompahgre Wilderness either live in or enter these lands from Ouray County and our gateway communities of Ridgway and Ouray using Ouray County Road 8 which leads to the crest of Owl Creek Pass. We have consulted with our Gunnison County Commissioner colleagues for many years while the GPLI was meeting and developing this proposal. We join Gunnison and other neighboring counties in supporting the GORP Act. **While Ouray County is especially enthusiastic about the proposed additions to the Uncompahgre Wilderness, we join our neighboring counties to support the entire GORP Act.**

Thank you for your work and leadership toward protecting our most pristine and treasured wildlands and watersheds.

Respectfully,


Michelle Nauer, Chair


Lynn M. Padgett, Vice-Chair


Jake Niece, Member

Town of Crested Butte

P.O. Box 39 Crested Butte, Colorado 81224

-A National Historic District-

Phone: (970) 349-5338
FAX: (970) 349-6626
www.townofcrestedbutte.com

September 3, 2024

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

Dear Senator Bennet:

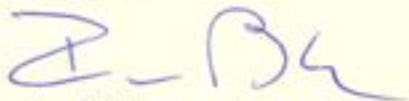
I am pleased to convey the Town of Crested Butte's support for the Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection ("GORP") Act.

The public lands around Crested Butte are critical to our community's quality of life. They are a cornerstone of our culture. They support the ranching, scientific research, and outdoor recreation that drives our economy. They are the source of the water we drink. And they are the home to the wildlife, wildflowers, and wild places that we work to sustain and celebrate. The GORP Act will help to sustain our public lands and, in the process, our community and values.

The GORP Act will benefit conservation, outdoor recreation, and traditional uses while advancing wildlife and watershed protections. Our residents understand that and have been vocal in their support. The Town has been engaged through the development of the GORP Act, and we very much appreciate the opportunities we have had to participate in the transparent and collaborative process through which it was developed, as well as your leadership in and support for that process.

We appreciate the response to our comments and reasonable adjustments made to the plan based on them. Please let us know how we can help support you in moving the GORP Act through Congress.

Sincerely,



Ian Billick
Mayor



September 3, 2024

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

Dear Senator Bennet:

We write to express the Town of Mt. Crested Butte's strong support for the Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection ("GORP") Act.

The conservation of the federal public lands surrounding the Town of Mount Crested Butte is a priority for our community. For our residents, our federal public lands contribute immeasurably to our economy and quality of life. For our visitors from across Colorado and around the world, they are a critical reason to come to Mt. Crested Butte and an essential part of their experience. The provisions of the GORP Act will help sustain those federal lands and our community for generations to come.

The Town of Mt. Crested Butte has been engaged throughout the development of the GORP Act and very much appreciates the transparent and collaborative process through which it was developed. Numerous community members have expressed to us their desire for protection and improved management of these areas. We couldn't be more in agreement with their support for the GORP Act.

We thank you again for your longstanding support for this community-driven proposal. We stand ready to proudly support you in advancing the GORP Act through Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nicholas Kempin".

Nicholas Kempin
Mayor, Mt. Crested Butte



City of Gunnison

August 29, 2024

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

Dear Senator Bennet:

We write to express the City of Gunnison's strong support for the Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection ("GORP") Act.

The provisions of the GORP Act exhibit qualities that are significant to the lifestyles and livelihoods of City of Gunnison residents and visitors, including protecting important habitat for big game species such as elk, moose, mule deer, and black bear, conserving open range for grazing livestock, protecting freshwater supplies critical to the City of Gunnison, maintaining valuable backcountry experiences and opportunities for recreation, and supporting our local hunting and fishing economy and businesses.

The City Council of Gunnison has been engaged through the development of the GORP Act and very much appreciates the transparent and collaborative process through which it was developed. The GORP Act is very much a community-based legislative effort that we endorse, and we appreciate your long-standing support for that effort.

Gunnison residents and many visitors treasure the public lands around the City of Gunnison and highly value them for diverse reasons such as recreation, grazing, wildlife, and watershed protection, for example. Numerous community members have expressed to us their desire for protection and improved management of these areas. We couldn't be more in agreement with their support for the GORP Act.

We thank you again for your longstanding support for this community-driven proposal. We stand ready to proudly support you in advancing the GORP Act through Congress.

Sincerely,

Diego Plata
Mayor, City of Gunnison



Town of Paonia

Offices of the Mayor & Board of Trustees

Paige Smith, *Mayor*

John Valentine, *Mayor Pro-Tempore*

Rick Stelter, *Trustee*

Walter Czech, *Trustee*

Lucy Hunter, *Trustee*

Kathy Swartz, *Trustee*

August 27, 2024

Dear Senator Bennet,

Thank you for your ongoing work to protect public lands and watersheds in the Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection (GORP) Act. We appreciate your commitment to community-driven conservation solutions, and for seeking public input throughout this process. We are supportive of this legislation for its potential to permanently protect significant portions of the North Fork Valley Watershed, including public lands in the upper watershed of Gunnison County, the source water areas for the Town of Paonia, and Jumbo Mountain.

The waters that flow through the river and ditch systems of the North Fork give life to our small farms and ranches. Big game, like elk and mule deer, utilize the lower-elevation areas in Delta County as winter habitat, and traverse the drainages to spend summer in the West Elks and Raggeds. Members of our community and visitors from around the county seek out the wild landscapes of this area, including accessible routes along the West Elk Scenic Byway, popular mountain biking areas, and hiking and horseback riding in wilderness areas.

Protected public lands contribute to a healthy environment, our quality of life, and local economies on the Western Slope. We support the inclusion of nearby areas in Gunnison County including the Clear Fork Special Management Area, Pilot Knob Special Management Area, Beckwiths Special Management Area, Horse Ranch Park Recreation Area, Munsey Creek Wildlife Conservation Area, Lamborn Wilderness Addition, and Erickson Springs Wilderness Addition.

We believe that the North Fork Valley Watershed withdrawal in the GORP Act would greatly benefit from legislative protections. Critically, the North Fork Valley Watershed withdrawal would apply to many of the Bureau of Land Management surface-managed areas in the County as well as the Delta County portion of Mt. Lamborn. No Surface Occupancy protections for Currant Creek, Electric Mountain, and Elk Park Roadless Areas in the Grand, Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests would further protect land, water, and wildlife.

Protecting critical areas like the Town of Paonia's source water area and Jumbo Mountain, which had been previously open to oil and gas development would greatly benefit our community. The public lands and waterways of the North Fork Valley surround our communities and connect us. Protecting these connections and reducing carbon emission is especially important for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Thank you,

Sign: _____


Paige Smith, Mayor



September 9, 2024

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

Dear Senator Bennet:

I am writing to express the strong support of the Town on Ridgway for the Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection (GORP) Act. Along with our friends in the Gunnison valley, we have followed the Gunnison Public Lands initiative (GPLI) for years, and appreciate the transparent and collaborative manner in which the outline of the GORP Act was crafted.

The western-most lands included in the GORP Act are easily seen and readily accessed from Ridgway, and our residents and visitors alike place great value on the spectacular Cimarron country. Many people consider the Cimarron Ridge, and all the incredible territory it helps define, one of Ridgway's defining landmarks. The area offers superlative scenery and high quality hunting, fishing, and backcountry recreation. As these lands are most easily accessed from Ridgway, our residents consider it vital to protect them in their current state.

We appreciate the dedication of you and your staff through years of hard work and negotiation that led to such a widely supported proposal. We also commend you for your commitment to honoring the wishes of local and regional stakeholders; it is gratifying to see the GORP Act stay true to this truly community based effort.

The Town of Ridgway stands ready to help in any way to support you as you work the GORP Act through the legislative process. Thank you for your tireless efforts to protect our incredible natural heritage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John I. Clark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "C".

John I. Clark
Mayor
Town of Ridgway