



February 9, 2024

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Haaland and Secretary Vilsack:

We are pleased to see the draft Environmental Assessment (EA) released for the Thompson Divide. Given the extraordinary and broad-based community support for this proposal, we request that the Secretaries move quickly to complete the Administrative Withdrawal in advance of the end of the two-year segregation period with the modifications we outline below.

For more than a decade, we have worked to advance legislation – currently titled the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act – that will bring permanent protections to over 420,000 acres of vital public lands in Colorado, including over 200,000 acres on the Thompson Divide. This legislation was written in Colorado with consistent engagement alongside dedicated state and local partners.

Regrettably, progress in Congress has stalled despite strong support in Colorado. That is why we formally requested administrative action to protect this landscape in August 2022. We were pleased when President Biden visited Colorado on October 12, 2022 and directed the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to initiate a 20-year Administrative Withdrawal for the Thompson Divide. We continue to strongly support the proposed Administrative Withdrawal and see it as an important step that will provide meaningful interim protections for this landscape while we continue working toward a permanent solution in Congress.

For over a decade, surrounding communities have unified around the cause to prevent oil and gas development in the Thompson Divide. After the Bureau of Land Management announced the Administrative Withdrawal proposal, the agency received over 60,000 – mostly supportive – written comments, which demonstrates that that support today is as strong as ever. Those comments came from a wide variety of stakeholders including local residents, farmers and ranchers, hunters and anglers, water users, recreationists, wildlife enthusiasts, conservation groups, and numerous Coloradans who support protecting the Thompson Divide.

Additionally, many local governments adjacent to the Thompson Divide submitted comments that support mineral withdrawal for the area. These include the Town of Carbondale, the City of Glenwood Springs, the Town of Crested Butte, the Town of Mt. Crested Butte, the City of Gunnison, the Town of Paonia, the Town of Marble, as well as Pitkin and Gunnison Counties.

There are two minor modifications we request to the proposed boundary. First, the energy industry, the Thompson Divide Coalition, Gunnison County, wildlife advocates and the congressional delegation collaboratively developed a boundary in the Muddy Creek area that all parties support. The current Administrative Withdrawal boundary does not reflect this long-standing agreement. We request that the final administrative boundary reflect this boundary as currently contained in the legislative proposal for the Thompson Divide area in the CORE Act.

Second, the proposed boundary of the Thompson Divide mineral withdrawal in the CORE Act and the Administrative Withdrawal now encompasses the area known as Red Lady- or Mt. Emmons- outside of Crested Butte. Red Lady has been subject to decades of debate between mining interests and the community who vehemently opposed plans for mining in this area. The community and the current owner of the site, Mt. Emmons Mining Company (MEMC), have agreed to end the possibility of mining in this area while remediating effects from historical mining on the watershed. To accomplish this shared objective, MEMC has proposed a land exchange to allow the company to more efficiently clean up the property; in exchange, the community will receive conservation agreements prohibiting mining activities at the site.

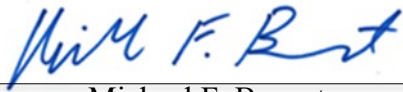
While the Administrative Withdrawal will provide critical community protections, the agencies must remove a small unintentional overlap of the proposed projects from the final Withdrawal area for both projects to move forward. If the agencies move forward with a withdrawal area which overlaps with the proposed Mt. Emmons Land Exchange, said land exchange would not be able to proceed as the agencies cannot exchange Administratively withdrawn parcels. When deciding on the requested withdrawal, we ask that the Secretary of Interior exclude the lands proposed for exchange from the withdrawal application area in order to allow the land exchange to proceed.

The community and MEMC are also working on a plan to rehabilitate the Gossan fire scar in this area to help reduce the inflow of heavy metals into the watershed. They additionally support these projects, which are part of the ongoing collaborative efforts to remediate the legacy of mining in this area. As part of the final solution of this long-standing issue, we ask that both the land exchange and Gossan fire scar projects move forward in the months ahead.

We will continue working to deliver permanent protection for the Thompson Divide, and believe a 20-year Administrative Withdrawal is a significant step that provides nearby communities with near-term assurance as we work to advance the CORE Act in Congress.

We are grateful for your consideration of the requests in this letter and look forward to working with you on this process.

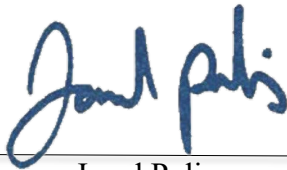
Sincerely,



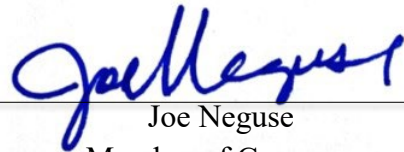
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



Jared Polis
Governor of Colorado



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress

Cc: Nada Culver, Tracy Stone Manning, Meryl Harrell, Chad Stewart, Scott Fitzwilliams, Larry Sandoval, Frank Beum