

Tom Jankovsky
District 1

John Martin, Chair
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District 3



March 8, 2021

U.S. Representative Diana DeGette
United States House of Representatives
2111 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-4329

Re: *Garfield County offers a Letter in Opposition to the Colorado Wilderness Act*

Dear Congresswoman DeGette,

Garfield County would like to provide this letter in opposition to the Colorado Wilderness Act which is one part of a massive eight-bill package called the "Protecting America's Wilderness & Public Lands Act."

Context matters greatly here. Garfield County is one of the largest counties in Colorado, containing about 1,892,000 acres of land situated in northwestern Colorado. The federal government is the largest landowner in Garfield County, owning approximately 62.3 percent of the land within the County, and two federal agencies, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the U.S. Forest Service, are responsible for managing over 1,100,000 acres (or 2,000 square miles) of these federal lands as illustrated in **Exhibit A**, attached.

Finally, in 1975, Congress already designated 196,344 acres in the White River National Forest known as the Flat Tops Wilderness Area which falls predominantly in Garfield County and is approximately 38% of the lands held by the United States Forest Service in the County.

Designating lands as wilderness does not assure its preservation. Left in an undisturbed or natural state, these lands are highly susceptible to wildland wildfires, insect infestation and disease, all of which exacerbate greenhouse emissions which adversely impact global climate change. Because of the predominance of federal land in Garfield County, the wellbeing, health, safety, welfare, economic condition, and culture of the County, its businesses, and its citizens depend on the manner in which these lands and their resources are used and access to these lands.

Many of Garfield County's businesses and its citizens are involved in or otherwise depend on industries that utilize federal lands and their resources, including the forest products industry, livestock grazing, oil and gas exploration and production, mining and mineral development, recreational industries, hunting and other outdoor recreation. These industries are important components of the Colorado economy, and are major contributors to the economic and social wellbeing of Garfield County and its citizens.

The Garfield County Commissioners find the Colorado Wilderness Act is a piecemeal wilderness approach pushed by an urban front range legislator who does not represent the citizens of Garfield

County; rather, represents the citizens of Colorado's 1st Congressional District, comprised of the City and County of Denver and Denver suburbs.

Approximately 11% (or nearly 71,256 acres) of the proposed wilderness is contained, either in full or in part, in Garfield County. Unfortunately, you as the bill's sponsor did not elect to meaningfully engage or coordinate with Garfield County or many of the other west slope counties which also have been designated for additional wilderness.

The ***Garfield County Federal Lands Natural Resources Coordination Plan and Policies*** contains the following specific policies regarding wilderness designation that the Commissioners wish to provide as the bill proceeds through the legislature.

- 1) Federal land use designations such as Wilderness, WSA's, LWC's and ACEC's impose restrictions that often include reduced access and the diminished use or elimination of mining, oil and gas development, grazing, hunting and recreation. These activities substantially contribute to the local economy and the County's ability to properly fund and serve the public needs. All consideration of special land use designations must be coordinated with Garfield County and meet the statutory requirement imposed by Congress. All management activities and uses on these lands must be coordinated with Garfield County. Full access and productive use of the land shall be authorized as allowed under federal, state and local law.
- 2) Simply designating a wilderness does not assure its preservation. An understanding of wilderness values is needed to guide all activities in wilderness, including grazing, access to private lands, mining, fish and wildlife, cultural sites, fire, and insects and disease. Management is needed to minimize the impacts of the wilderness visitor on the immediate environment and the experience of other visitors. Wilderness management applies guidelines derived from social and natural sciences to preserve the qualities for which wilderness was established. Ultimately, if so designated by Congress, wilderness areas should require active management as discussed here.
- 3) All valid existing lease rights and historical uses in wilderness areas, WSA's, LWC's and ACEC's shall be protected and continue and required by federal, state and local laws.
- 4) WSA's should be released from consideration as Wilderness that contain non-wilderness characteristics, such as roads or active oil and gas wells.
- 5) Management and the authorization of uses of special land use designations should be compatible with surrounding management and contribute to the sound policy of multiple use, economic viability, and community stability.
- 6) As a part of the authorized uses on Wilderness, WSA's, LWC's and ACEC's, continued access to and maintenance of water developments, fences, and other infrastructure located within designated wilderness, must continue at the same or greater level allowed prior to the special designation. All valid existing lease rights and historical uses in Wilderness areas, WSA's, LWC's and ACEC's shall be protected and continue as required by federal, state and local law.
- 7) ***Consideration of new areas for Wilderness, WSA's, LWC's or ACEC's should be analyzed in coordination with the County.***

- 8) Designations of Wilderness areas, WSA's, LWC's or ACEC's that would compromise the County's ability to properly protect the lives, welfare and property of its citizens are prohibited.
- 9) Infrastructure such as roads, fences, pipelines and water tanks are recognized by the County as improvements that have permanently altered the landscape, connecting man's development activities directly to the land, regardless of whether such elements can be removed. Any areas with these features shall not qualify as areas with wilderness characteristics.
- 10) Accurate, on-the-ground mapping of roads, fences, rangeland improvement and any other anthropogenic influence in lands under consideration for Wilderness, LWCs or ACECs , shall be completed and included with any inventory or proposal for a potential designation, including those prepared by the County.
- 11) All information relied on by the agency for any special designation, whether this be for Wilderness, LWC or ACEC, shall meet the standards established by the Information Quality Act (44 U.S.C. §3516) and implementing guidelines.

It is our hope that these points above can be conveyed for consideration as the bill proceeds through the legislature. Please do not hesitate to contact Chairman John Martin for further information.

Very truly yours,

John Martin, Chairman

Cc Board of County Commissioners
U.S. Representative Ken Buck
U.S. Representative Doug Lamborn
U.S. Representative Lauren Boebert
U.S. Representative Joe Neguse
U.S. Representative Jason Crow
U.S. Representative Ed Perlmutter
U.S. Senator John Hickenlooper
U.S. Senator Michael Bennet
Elijah Waters, BLM Northwest Colorado District Manager
Greg Larson, BLM Upper Colorado River District Manager
Lisa M. Stoeffler, Acting Forest Supervisor, White River National Forest
Kevin Batchelder, Garfield County Manager
Fred Jarman, Garfield County Deputy Manager

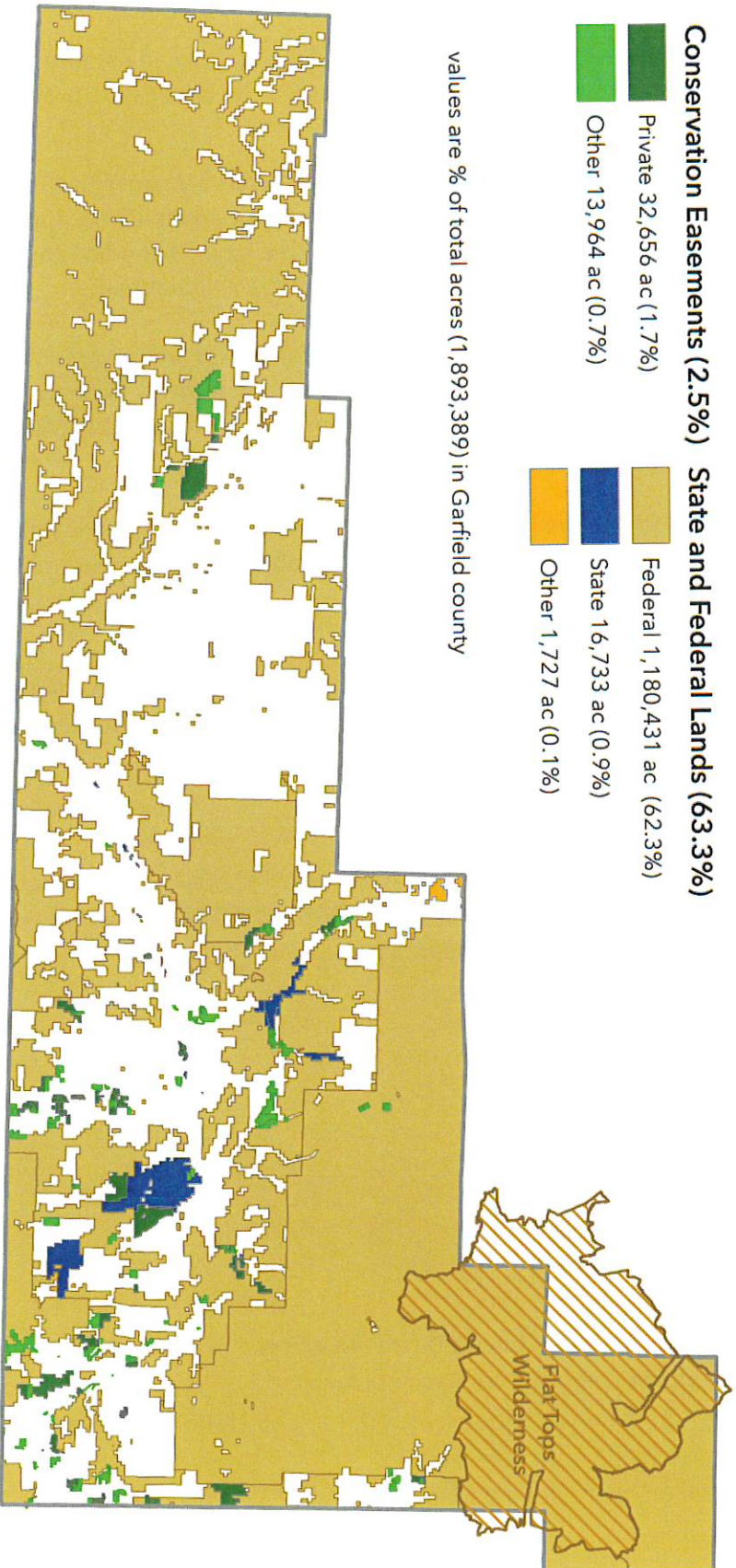
Exhibit A

Garfield County Land Ownership

Conservation Easements (2.5%) State and Federal Lands (63.3%)

	Private 32,656 ac (1.7%)		Federal 1,180,431 ac (62.3%)
	Other 13,964 ac (0.7%)		State 16,733 ac (0.9%)
			Other 1,727 ac (0.1%)

values are % of total acres (1,893,389) in Garfield county



Garfield County Enterprise GIS
Prepared: February 9, 2021
Calculations based on GIS Conservation Easements, State and Federal Ownership, and County Boundary layers