



BEN TISDEL  
LYNN M. PADGETT  
JAKE NIECE

## BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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July 20, 2021

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 support for our neighboring county's Gunnison Public Lands Initiative (GPLI). Similar to the development of the CORE Act and the preceding San Juan Wilderness Act, GPLI has been developed through a transparent and collaborative community-driven process engaging diverse stakeholders. Your staff has helped the GPLI process be successful.

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. The Uncompahgre Wilderness is shared by Gunnison, Ouray, and Hinsdale Counties. We want to be on record supporting GPLI, especially the proposed additions to the Uncompahgre Wilderness: Turret Ridge, Little Cimarron, and Failes Creek/Soldier Creek additions. Together, these proposed additions encompass roughly 12,600 acres, and would protect unique geology and ecosystems which provide ecosystem services and 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 additions can also be viewed from Ouray County's scenic Highway 550 corridor north of Ridgway. Their ruggedness and lack of trails ensures 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 habitat for wildlife including lynx and moose.

Separately, as a cooperating agency with the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forests land use plan revision, we are asking for the GMUG to analyze lands in Ouray County as potential Uncompahgre Wilderness addition parcels: Bear Creek and Baldy. We welcome any assistance from your office in creating a similar collaborative stakeholder engagement process to vet those potential parcels in the future.

Although the GPLI lands lie primarily in Gunnison County, a primary access route is via Ouray County Road 8 leading east to the crest of Owl Creek Pass. We have consulted with our Gunnison County Commissioner colleagues, and we are aligned with them in supporting GPLI. So long as there is continued support from Gunnison County, we respectfully request that the Turret Ridge, Little Cimarron, and Failes Creek/Soldier Creek wilderness addition parcels be included in timely legislation to create congressional designations identified in the GPLI.

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

Respectfully,

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Ben Tisdel, Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lynn M. Padgett".

Lynn M. Padgett, Vice-Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jake Niece".

Jake Niece, Member