

## COMMENTARY

## Election Day was a good day for public lands

The bar is low, our expectations should be high



Sam Liebl  
Times Editor

Regardless as to how you feel about Joe Biden or Donald Trump, the Election Day outcomes were good for public lands that make up 83% of Gunnison County.

Those lands are mostly a mix of federal parcels managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the National Park Service (NPS). For all of those agencies, the last four years have been a beat down.

Against the better judgement of local federal lands workers and often in opposition to communities in the Western U.S., the political appointees in charge have pushed for maximum resource utilization. The USFS has pursued aggressive timber harvest quotas across the country. This year the Gunnison Ranger District pulled a record number of board feet out of Gunnison Valley forests. In the Uncompahgre Field Office of the BLM, leadership at the BLM pushed through a resource management plan that ignored public input and placed fossil fuels before the agricultural industry around which the North Fork valley has molded its post-coal identity.

The bar for improvement could not be lower. Among the federal lands workers with whom I've spoken, there is a consensus that any administration other than the present one would be a step up.

That is in large part because the USFS, the BLM, the NPS and all other federal bureaus are to some degree prohibited from acting on climate change science.

For most federal land management decisions in the Gunnison Valley, climate change is the elephant in the room. The forests and rangelands of the present are not the forests and rangelands we can expect to have in 20, 50, 100 years. We're already seeing this change with beetle-killed trees, forests converting permanently to shrubs after fires and the ease with which cheatgrass is moving into our sagebrush steppe.

It remains to be seen whether the Gunnison Valley will have more or less precipitation as the earth warms, but the 20-year drought in the Colorado River

Basin is in line with scientists' predictions about the Western Slope becoming more arid. Even with more snow and rain, higher temperatures will make our rivers, reservoirs and aquifers fill less frequently and drop to low levels more often.

Climate change impacts, therefore, are crucial for federal land managers to consider when they decide where and how many trees to harvest for timber. They are crucial for deciding where to let wildfires burn and what goals should be with mechanical vegetation treatments and prescribed burns. They are essential for deciding how wildlife populations should be managed with hunting and with translocations. They are needed to determine the timing of grazing and how much forage can be grazed sustainably. And they are needed to determine which invasive plants should be fought with herbicides.

Along with an administration that acknowledges climate change, our public lands will likely benefit from the election of John Hickenlooper to the Senate.

Hickenlooper is poised to bring a more balanced approach to public lands than outgoing Senator Cory Gardner. He has a record of supporting the fossil fuel industry in Colorado and of supporting landscape-level conservation efforts. That sort of middle path is in line with the Colorado Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act, a

grassroots piece of legislation that would protect a chunk of Gunnison County in the Thompson Divide area and establish the boundaries of the Curecanti National Recreation Area.

To the detriment of Colorado's public lands, Gardner has declined to support the CORE Act in the Senate. Hickenlooper, on the other hand, made passage of the CORE Act part of his campaign.

Balanced, well-informed management of Gunnison County's public lands should not be a partisan issue. Indeed, public lands were for the most part a point of consensus in this year's county commissioner campaigns.

Our public lands should be utilized but not recklessly and not without incorporating local input. We should have mineral extraction in Gunnison County. We should harvest timber. We should both start fires and put out fires in forests. We should modify our watersheds to protect water supplies for humans and wildlife. But we need to do so in a way that does not compromise our children's abilities to meet their needs. Starting in January, that's the kind of thinking our public land managers should be free to embrace.

(Sam Liebl can be contacted at 970.641.1414 or editor@gunnisontimes.com)

## LETTERS

## Capitol Christmas tree and the future forest

Editor:

This Thursday, Nov. 12, the Capitol Christmas tree rolls through Gunnison on its epic journey to Washington, D.C.

Every year, a different National Forest is selected to provide a tree for the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol Building for the holidays, and this year's tree is from our local Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forest.

While this tradition is a celebration that highlights the GMUG at the national level, it also provides us with time to reflect on the future of our forests.

Three local and regional efforts have been developed that would contribute significantly to a sustainable future for the GMUG.

First, the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative (GPLI), a community-driven process aimed at protecting Gunnison County's incredible natural heritage, reached a milestone in August when Senator Michael Bennet joined stakeholders near Crested Butte to announce his intention to draft legislation that advances the GPLI Proposal. To learn more and show your support visit [www.gunnisonpubliclands.org](http://www.gunnisonpubliclands.org).

Second, the GMUG is revising its forest plan, a process that will guide forest management for decades to come, and a regional effort is underway to enshrine new conservation recommendations in the revised plan. Public lands advocates, business owners, farmers, recreationists, elected officials, and others have developed a Community Conservation Proposal ([www.gmugrevision.com](http://www.gmugrevision.com)) which we are encouraging the Forest Service to adopt.

Third, the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act would — amongst other things — protect large swaths of the Gunnison National Forest in the Upper North Fork. To learn more, visit <https://coreact.org/>.

As we celebrate the holidays this year, let's also celebrate the natural wonders of our public lands. Lend your support to the efforts above, and help sustain a wild GMUG for generations to come.

Matt Reed  
Public Lands Director  
High Country Conservation  
Advocates

## The time has come for resistance

Editor:

Being more pragmatic, and not "progressive," politically speaking, I thank Trudy and Dave for providing Democrats with some local election entertainment, not to mention all those ad dollars being spent for 37% and 39% of the county vote, respectively. The Dems didn't have to campaign here in order to win, really. Dave, you did great! You came within 2% of the last Republican who ran for commissioner in these parts.

Nationally, pending legal challenges concerning voter fraud, we're facing the possibility of having a man staring at senility as president, who campaigned mainly from his basement and was possibly aided by Dominion voting machines. After over four years of stating the opposite, he's now changed his siren song tune to: "Let's have unity now that we're in charge!" To this I politely say: "garbage."

The time has come for non-violent resistance from us non-conformists, for however long it takes. Respect our nation, protect all Americans, protect our borders, fund all police, cherish our lawful diversity, help good businesses survive,

and promote equal opportunity — not equal outcome — for all Americans, regardless of their circumstances.

Jon Matuszczak  
Gunnison

## A thank you to Wenum and McPhail

Editor:

A personal thank you to two residents of Gunnison County that have made my work, both as a wildlife biologist and a rancher more effective and enjoyable:

J Wenum, thank you for being the consummate wildlife professional. Without your willingness to take on issues outside the box of most wildlife agencies, the Gunnison County sage-grouse conservation program would not be nearly as effective nor have the credibility that it has.

Eric McPhail, thanks for your patience, willingness to work with the many aspects of our agricultural community and for being the ultimate extension agent. The workshops, information and expertise you provide to us is invaluable.

Jim Cochran  
Powderhorn

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