July \_\_, 2021

The Honorable Michael Bennet

261 Russell Senate Office building

Washington, D,C. 20510

Dear Senator Bennet:

We write to express Ouray County Board of County Commissioners’ unanimous support for the inclusion of the following additions to the Uncompahgre Wilderness in the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative (GPLI:)

* Turret Ridge,
* Little Cimarron
* Failes Creek/Soldier Creek

These three units totally 17,400 acres possess wilderness qualities including naturalness, roadlessness, and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. In addition scenic, geologic, botanical and wildlife values can be found there. Turret Ridge is a spectacular vista frequently photographed from Ouray County The units extend and encompass wildlife corridors and migration routes for big game moving from higher elevation mountainous terrain to critical wintering grounds near Blue Mesa Reservoir. They also provide habitat for the endangered Canada lynx.

We recognize that the lower elevation ecosystem types included in these units are underrepresented in the wilderness preservation systems – both here in Colorado and nationally. We strongly support the addition of these ecosystem types in the GPLI proposal especially as we consider the need for ecosystem integrity and resiliency to maintain biodiversity and facilitate species migration in the face of climate change.

Ouray County has followed the progress of GPLI for some time, and feel confident that the process has been transparent and collaborative, thanks in large part to you and your staff’s involvement. The current GPLI proposal is very much a community-based effort that we endorse.

Although the lands in these three units lie primarily in Gunnison County, considerable access is achieved from Ouray County. Our residents and many visitors treasure these landscapes in the Cimarron Range and routinely recreate there. A number of local residents have expressed to us their desire for protection of these areas, and we couldn’t be more in agreement with their impassioned support of inclusion of Turret Ridge, Little Cimarron and Failes Creek/Soldier Creek in GPLI.

We are consulting with Gunnison County however, to ensure a cooperative approach to protecting these deserving places.

We request that, with the support of Gunnison County, the proposed Uncompahgre additions be included in the final GPLI package. We welcome the opportunity to advance this initiative, and wish to thank you again for your work in protecting the many diverse and important lands in the region.

Sincerely,