

The Honorable Michael Bennet  
458 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510  
*(submitted via email)*

West Slope Conservation Center  
PO Box 1612  
Paonia, CO 81428

January 14, 2016

Dear Senator Bennet,

The Western Slope Conservation Center was founded in 1977 to protect the ecosystems of the North Fork of the Gunnison and Lower Gunnison Watersheds. We work diligently to ensure that the communities of the Lower Gunnison Watershed have intact and functioning ecosystems, clean and abundant water, and well-managed lands with the highest level of protection they deserve.

We see the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative's (GPLI) proposal to protect Forest Service and BLM Lands in Gunnison County with Congressional designation as a key element to this vision. Their proposal seeks to ensure that critical wildlife habitat, headwaters, and pristine recreation will remain unspoiled from unnecessary development.

Congressional designation is the strongest, most permanent form of protection for public lands. It is the best way to ensure that our heritage is passed on to future generations, so that our children and grandchildren will have the opportunity to live in a healthy environment and know the incredible natural splendor of our home on the western slope.

GPLI has been careful, methodical, and inclusive in putting together their proposal. They have chosen areas that have strong community consensus behind them and will prove most beneficial to our communities in their natural state. The lands that they have proposed for protection include some of our most important places in the North Fork Valley. Mt. Lamborn is a central feature in our viewshed and the Muddy drainage and Pilot Knob is the source of our agricultural water.

Our quality of life and the strength of our economy in the North Fork depend on the health of our public lands. Agriculture and tourism are mainstays of our economy – providing jobs and good salaries to hundreds of people. Protected healthy wild lands are essential to our diverse land- and water-based economy, and they provide the high quality of life that western slope residents ceaselessly work to protect.

Supporting the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative makes sense: for our ecosystems, for our lifestyle, and for our economy. We thank you for taking the first steps in making this proposal a reality. Please continue your important work in protecting these special places in Gunnison County.

Sincerely,

Alex Johnson, Executive Director  
Western Slope Conservation Center