



Town of Paonia

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August 27, 2024

Dear Senator Bennet,

Thank you for your ongoing work to protect public lands and watersheds in the Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection (GORP) Act. We appreciate your commitment to community-driven conservation solutions, and for seeking public input throughout this process. We are supportive of this legislation for its potential to permanently protect significant portions of the North Fork Valley Watershed, including public lands in the upper watershed of Gunnison County, the source water areas for the Town of Paonia, and Jumbo Mountain.

The waters that flow through the river and ditch systems of the North Fork give life to our small farms and ranches. Big game, like elk and mule deer, utilize the lower-elevation areas in Delta County as winter habitat, and traverse the drainages to spend summer in the West Elks and Raggeds. Members of our community and visitors from around the county seek out the wild landscapes of this area, including accessible routes along the West Elk Scenic Byway, popular mountain biking areas, and hiking and horseback riding in wilderness areas.

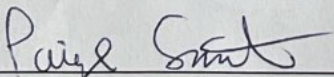
Protected public lands contribute to a healthy environment, our quality of life, and local economies on the Western Slope. We support the inclusion of nearby areas in Gunnison County including the Clear Fork Special Management Area, Pilot Knob Special Management Area, Beckwiths Special Management Area, Horse Ranch Park Recreation Area, Munsey Creek Wildlife Conservation Area, Lamborn Wilderness Addition, and Erickson Springs Wilderness Addition.

We believe that the North Fork Valley Watershed withdrawal in the GORP Act would greatly benefit from legislative protections. Critically, the North Fork Valley Watershed withdrawal would apply to many of the Bureau of Land Management surface-managed areas in the County as well as the Delta County portion of Mt. Lamborn. No Surface Occupancy protections for Currant Creek, Electric Mountain, and Elk Park Roadless Areas in the Grand, Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests would further protect land, water, and wildlife.

Protecting critical areas like the Town of Paonia's source water area and Jumbo Mountain, which had been previously open to oil and gas development would greatly benefit our community. The public lands and waterways of the North Fork Valley surround our communities and connect us. Protecting these connections and reducing carbon emission is especially important for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Thank you,

Sign: _____


Paige Smith, Mayor