TBD,

On behalf of Gunnison County, we would like to strongly oppose any federal effort to directly transfer or create easier avenues for the transfer of federally protected public lands to the states. Public lands are arguably one of America's greatest ideas and some of our greatest treasures. They are our heritage and they are our future and our template for preservation has been replicated throughout the world.

Public lands across the West, across Colorado and so noticeably in Gunnison County are tied to our heritage, our history, our way of life and most certainly our future. Federally protected public lands in Gunnison County are the foundation of our economy supporting a job base that is rooted in outdoor recreation, sporting activities, extractive industries, scientific research, timber extraction, ranching and agriculture as well as other beneficial opportunities. In turn, we recognize our responsibility to be good stewards of these lands and make sure that our use and opportunity is tempered with a conservation minded thoughtfulness that protects and nurtures these lands for generations to come.

The positive economic impacts of public lands are well documented. Looking at just the outdoor recreation industry alone, it nationally creates $646 billion in direct spending each year and creates 6.1 million American jobs. In the state of Colorado, active outdoor recreation contributes over $10 billion annually to our economy, supports 107,000 jobs across the state, generates nearly $500 million in annual state tax revenue and produces $7.6 billion annually in retail sales, accounting for 4 percent of gross state product. A State of the Rockies poll shows that Colorado voters clearly value the impact public lands have on their economy – virtually all (98%) say they are an essential part of the state's economy and 85% agree that the state's public lands help attract high quality employers and good jobs. The outdoor recreation industry in Gunnison County is a strong segment of our overall economy.

Ranching and agricultural operations in Gunnison County are also a strong economic driver and job creator. We have many families who have ranched for generations in our county and their ability to graze on federal public land allotments has been to the benefit of not only their operations in producing food but also vital to protecting and conserving the landscapes and special places we cherish. Ranching and other agricultural related activities not only provide an economic benefit but put our water to beneficial use, maintain open space and provide habitat that is critical to a balanced ecosystem.

It has been noted that the transfer of public lands to the states could cost Colorado staggering amounts of money. For example, wildfire suppression spending by the Forest Service is so large that it can exceed what many Western states spend on police protection and law enforcement. Colorado depends on federal firefighters to control wildfires within the state. By seizing federal lands, Colorado would be responsible for the duties of public land managers. This includes providing enough staff and equipment to combat wildfires. Wildland firefighting costs last year topped $2 billion across the country, and in the 2012 wildfire season alone, fighting wildfire cost $92 million in Colorado.

Gunnison County is over 80% public lands which are essential because they support healthy communities, protect our natural environment, attract businesses and talent, are critical to our agricultural community and developed water rights and provide outdoor recreation opportunities. Rural Western counties with more than 30% of their lands under federal protection increased jobs at a rate 4 times faster than rural counties with no federally protected lands.

The transfer of lands to the states would be very likely to resort in the privatization or auctioning off of public lands to the highest bidder and would most likely eliminate access for Americans to places they hunt, fish, hike, bike, motorcycle, off-road, snowmobile, raft, watch wildlife and generally recreate. Nothing is more American than our public lands and transferring or selling them is not in the nation's best interest.

We would strongly urge you to take steps to oppose any attempts at the federal transfer or privatization of our public lands.

Respectfully,

Signature space…..