CRESTED BUTTE LAND TRUST

Preserving the Present for the Future

March 14, 2013

Paula Swenson, Phil Chamberland, and Jonathan Houck
Gunnison County Commissioners
200 East Virginia Avenue
Gunnison, Colorado 81230

Dear Paula, Phil and Jonathan:

I am elated to have the opportunity to request a letter of support for a new conservation project in the Slate River Valley. This project provides an extraordinary opportunity to support every single component of the Land Trust's mission – to forever protect and stewards open lands for vistas, recreation, wildlife and ranching.

The Land Trust's very first project, in 1991, was in the Slate River Valley, protecting the confluence of the Slate River and Coal Creek. Since then, the Land Trust has strategically preserved 1,300 acres in a seven mile stretch of the Slate River, with the following conservation partners: Great Outdoors Colorado, the Town of Crested Butte, the Gunnison Valley Land Preservation Board, the Trust for Public Land, the Gates Family Foundation, 1% for Open Space, and over 30 different landowners and their families.

As a requirement for funding from Great Outdoors Colorado, the Land Trust is seeking a letter of support from all local governments having land use authority over the Property. The letter must be on official letterhead and signed by the commission chair.

Just 2.5 miles northwest of the Town of Crested Butte, this Property is almost entirely surrounded by Crested Butte Land Trust conserved lands, and acquisition would complement this large network of open space lands as well as lands administered by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the Gunnison National Forest. Serving as the ultimate puzzle piece, this landscape connectivity magnifies the benefits of our community and state preservation efforts in the upper Slate River Valley.

In addition to the connectivity of wildlife habitat and scenic open space, the project will include access for the public. This will provide benefits to several local nonprofits, including the Crested Butte Nordic Council, the Wildflower Festival, the Adaptive Sports Center, and the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory. By meeting various community needs, the Land Trust can build lasting relationships and heighten the impact of its conservation work.

I am truly grateful for the Board of Commissioner's dedication and support of efforts to preserve the Slate River Valley. I appreciate your consideration of this exciting new endeavor.

Yours Truly,

Ann Johnston
Executive Director

ACCREDITED LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

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100% POST CONSUMER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Slate River Valley Property presents a long-awaited opportunity to purchase and preserve almost 100-acres of land in the Slate River Valley, stretching from the top of Anthracite Mesa to the valley floor below. ***This project extends the Crested Butte Land Trust's longest running conservation effort.***

Just a stone's throw from the Towns of Crested Butte and Mt. Crested Butte, protection will help ensure the long-term success of conservation efforts in the Slate River Valley, which contains some of the most pristine wetlands in the state of Colorado. Home to a diverse mosaic of willow, sedge, and aquatic communities, both the Crested Butte Land Trust and the Town of Crested Butte have worked diligently to preserve these wetlands and uplands since 1992.

The Land Trust will acquire the 100-acres and encumber it with a conservation easement. This is a single transaction not dependent on additional transactions. The Land Trust and Seller, [redacted] have signed a Contract for Bargain Sale of Real Estate. It is very common for landowners to ask for confidentiality during the initial stages of the due diligence, as this landowner has. While we understand the process for garnering a letter of support from the BOCC is public, we wanted to inform you that our public announcement of this project will come at a later date. Development and subdivision will be prohibited. The Property is in a natural, undeveloped state. Protection of the Property will accomplish the following conservation priorities:

Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitat: Conservation of the Slate River Valley Property will protect migration, foraging and resting habitat for a diverse array of wildlife species. These species include animals considered threatened, endangered or rare by the Colorado Parks and Wildlife, such as mountain toad (state endangered) and northern leopard frog (state species of concern). The Property lies within the overall ranges of several game species, including black bear, mountain lion, Rocky Mountain elk, and mule deer. Because of its proximity to other protected areas, and its position between summer and winter concentration areas for big game ungulates, the Property provides important seasonal transition habitat for Rocky Mountain elk and mule deer. This Property serves as an ecological bridge between areas identified by Colorado Parks and Wildlife as potential lynx habitat, listed as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Resplendent with several large stands of aspen and mixed conifer forest, it is common to see mountain bluebird, great-horned owl, and red-tail hawks on the Property.

Greenways/Stream Corridor: Located on the hillside east of the confluence of Oh-Be-Joyful Creek and the Slate River, the southwest portion of the Property lies within the Slate River Potential Conservation Area (PCA) designated by the Colorado National Heritage Program (CNHP). CNHP ranks the Slate River PCA as having "High Biodiversity Significance" and identifies several potential threats to the integrity of the wetland complex, including residential development. Seeps and springs add tremendous value for the wildlife that live on and frequent the Property. The Land Trust has already protected a significant portion of the Slate River wetland complex through acquisitions and conservation easements.

Scenic Viewshed and Open Space: Paradise Divide, locally known as Crested Butte's "oh my god" view, is arguably among one of the most iconic in scenic Gunnison County. The public views the Property from a single track trail on adjoining lands, which are used by over 500 recreationists a day, as well as from the Slate River Road (CR 734), a popular year-round access to the Gunnison National Forest. Views of the Slate River wetlands preserve, winding through the valley below, as well as neighboring peaks of the Ruby Range and Elk Mountains, and Mt. Crested Butte, are unsurpassed.

Agricultural Land: This valley has been used by the [redacted] for generations for cattle grazing. The Land Trust will continue this grazing lease to help ensure the viability of ranching. Development pressures in the valley have decreased the acreage available for ranching. Preservation of this high altitude grazing land will meet a community need by helping this valley remain a landscape that can support agriculture.

The Slate River Valley is truly beloved by the Crested Butte community, and its protection is a priority to many local organizations. Visitors, justifiably delighted when they visit, are always thrilled to discover that they can explore this valley from a trail that starts right from Town.