AGENDA ITEM or FINAL CONTRACT REVIEW SUBMITTAL FORM

Agenda Item: BOCC GPLI Letter

Action Requested: Board of County Commissioners' Signature

Parties to the Agreement:

Term Begins: **Term Ends:** **Grant Contract #:**

Summary:

GPLI letter

Fiscal Impact:

Submitted by: Liz Mense **Submitter's Email Address:** EMense@gunnisoncounty.org

Finance Review: ○ Required ◉ Not Required

Comments:

Reviewed by: Discharge Date:

County Attorney Review: ◉ Required ○ Not Required

Comments:
none

Reveiwed by: GUNCOUNTY1\dBaumgarten Discharge Date: 7/31/2020 Certificate of Insurance Required Yes ○ No ◉

County Manager Review:

Comments:

Reveiwed by: GUNCOUNTY1\mbirnie Discharge Date: 7/31/2020

◉ Consent Agenda ○ Regular Agenda ○ Worksession Time Allotted: 0

Agenda Date: 8/4/2020

Revised April 2015

August 4, 2020

The Honorable Michael Bennet
261 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Bennet:

We are writing to you regarding the multi-year effort by the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative (GPLI) to reach balanced agreements and make recommendations on how best to manage key wildland areas in Gunnison County. After years of discussion and compromise, the proposal has received broad community support, and we respectfully request that your office craft legislation based on the group's recommendations.

In the summer of 2012, you came to Gunnison County to meet with citizens, advocacy groups, and local officials on the banks of the Slate River to discuss the future of our treasured public lands. You said at the time that if the community were to bring to you a well-vetted proposal based on dialogue and collaboration among numerous interests in the county, that you would consider introducing legislation based on that in the Senate.

Subsequent to that meeting, several groups put forth plans for the public lands in Gunnison County, and in response to those and with the goal of developing a community consensus, Gunnison County Commissioners convened a working group, consisting of motorized, mechanized, and quiet recreation interests, ranchers, conservation groups, water interests, and wildlife advocates. The group utilized a professional facilitator, and agreed to operate based on respect for all views, open dialogue, and compromise. The GPLI held numerous meetings between February 2016 and June 2017 before releasing a report to the public with an initial set of recommendations. The group then convened several public forums to present the report and gather feedback from citizens and interest groups – that input was considered by the working group, and much was incorporated into a revised plan, released in January 2019.

Throughout this process, Gunnison County participated in the discussions and provided needed information and community-wide perspective. The County did not take positions on individual areas, rather served as conveners and supporters of transparent, equitable, and productive dialogue.

The GPLI's current proposal recommends the designation of three new wilderness areas and wilderness additions totaling 83,984 acres, and 23 special management Areas (SMAs) totaling 368,237 acres across the County. The working group believes this represents an appropriate balance to the protection and management of the natural, biological, recreational, scientific, agricultural and other values these lands offer in abundance. Several areas near the County boundaries remain under discussion, though the GPLI plans to resolve those in the near future. The County Commission believes that the proposal is ready for further action, and officially endorsed the recommendations in our July 29, 2019, comment on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest Working Draft of Revised Land Management Plan.

Based on our ongoing support of the GPLI process and recommendations, Gunnison County believes it is time to move to the legislative phase, and now requests that your office begin drafting a bill reflecting the balanced approach and broad community support for the GPLI proposal. We recognize the ongoing challenges that exist related to the COVID-19 pandemic, but we believe that the protection of our public lands will be crucial to the well-being of our community and our economic recovery in the months and years ahead. We stand ready to assist in any way as this process continues, and we look forward to continued partnership and dialogue.

Respectfully,