

Docket: LLCO923000-L1440000-ET0000 COC-080815
Email address: BLM_CO_Thompson_Divide@blm.gov

January 10, 2023

Dear BLM State Director Vilsack

I am an avid wildlife watcher, backcountry recreation user, ecologist by training, and resident of Ouray County. I am writing to urge the BLM/Department of the Interior to move forward with a 20-year administrative mineral withdrawal for the Thompson Divide. As you may be aware, diverse stakeholders have been working for years to protect Thompson Divide from extractive industries. From livestock producers and hunters to recreationists, wildlife advocates and conservationists, this land is valued for a plethora of reason.

- The over 200,000 acres under consideration is extraordinary wildlife habitat for diverse species and includes critical wildlife corridors both across space and across elevation. During these times of drought, wildfire and severe weather systems, large landscapes like Thompson Divide are crucial for all species that are enduring unprecedented stress.
- Twelve different watersheds are found within the region and provide drinking and irrigation water to many municipalities and ranchlands. Water resources in the west are quintessentially vital to all species including humans as demand increases with growing population and drought persists.
- The Thompson Divide is a recreation wonderland with year-round opportunities for motorized and non-motorized users from equestrians to snowmobilers to skiers and cyclists. Sportspeople also treasure this area for hunting as the game is plentiful and the scenery and wildness abound.
- Over a dozen Colorado Roadless Areas are located within the landscape and these unfragmented habitats are sadly becoming increasingly rare across Colorado with development pressures and timber operations.
- Numerous grazing permits exist within the Thompson Divide, and ranchers rely on these public lands for their economic survival while simultaneously helping to steward these lands.

Ultimately, I seek permanent protection for the Thompson Divide as is proposed in the Colorado Outdoor Recreation & Economy (CORE) Act, however until that legislation passes Congress, an administrative mineral withdrawal is crucial to protecting this area. I would so appreciate the BLM and USFS working together to withdraw the Thompson Divide from mineral extraction and to expand the acreage already under protection thanks to the White River National Forest forest plan.

I thank you for the opportunity to comment and appreciate your consideration of my input.

Respectfully,
Robyn Cascade