

January 13, 2023

Doug Vilsack
State Director, Bureau of Land Management, Colorado State Office
2850 Youngfield Street
Lakewood, CO 80215

Transmitted electronically to: BLM_CO_Thompson_Divide@blm.gov

Dear Director Vilsack,

The undersigned groups representing thousands of hunters and anglers across Colorado write to convey our support to withdraw, for a 20-year term, approximately 225,000 acres of the Thompson Divide area from all forms of entry, appropriation, and disposal under the public land laws; location, entry, and patent under the mining laws; and operation of the mineral leasing, mineral materials, and geothermal leasing laws, subject to valid existing rights. Additionally, we offer the following comments.

With its bounty of fish and wildlife habitat and rangelands supporting local communities, the Thompson Divide area remains critically important to local ranchers, hunters, and anglers in Colorado. The three primary game management units that span the Thompson Divide are among the most desirable to elk and mule deer hunters. The largely-roadless area serves as year-round habitat for those and other wildlife species and notably encompasses more than 40,000 acres of deer and elk migration corridors and over 50,000 acres of elk calving areas. These hunting units provide over 20,000 big-game licenses to resident and non-resident hunters each year, directing important revenue to Colorado Parks and Wildlife and local community businesses. The Thompson Divide also provides important recreation opportunities for anglers, climbers, bikers, skiers, equestrians, and hikers, luring people from near and far. As of 2013, the area supported more than [300 jobs and generated more than \\$30 million each year](#) in economic benefits to the local economy.

Additionally, the Thompson Divide is a coldwater fisheries stronghold and contains several conservation populations of Colorado River cutthroat trout, considered critical to the recovery and maintenance of the species in its native range. Among the 1,550 miles of stream radiating in all directions off Thompson Divide, about 83 miles qualify as native cutthroat stream habitat, with nearly twelve acres of cutthroat lake habitat interspersed as well. Several of these waters are also designated as “outstanding natural waters” by the state of Colorado for their pristine water quality. The northern boundary of the withdrawal and protection area includes 4.4 miles of Gold Medal fishing water along the Roaring Fork River, and Thompson Divide’s headwater tributaries extend to additional high-quality fisheries in the North Fork of the Gunnison River, the Crystal River, and the Colorado River, all of which sustain retailers, fishing guides, and outfitters who drive the local recreation and tourism economy.

Some places are appropriate for energy development, but the Thompson Divide simply is not one of them. Local stakeholders have worked diligently to propose a management model that retains important compatible uses like ranching, hunting, and fishing. We continue to support a permanent solution for the Thompson Divide but applaud the Bureau of Land Management and United States Forest Service for proposing a 20-year administrative mineral withdrawal.

Sincerely,

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Colorado Trout Unlimited

Colorado Wildlife Federation

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Trout Unlimited