

January 5, 2024

Anthony Edwards, Deputy Forest Supervisor
Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest
2250 Main Street
Delta CO 81416

Submitted via portal <https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public//CommentInput?Project=63679>

Re: Draft EA and FONSI for proposed Thompson Divide Administrative Withdrawal

Dear Deputy Forest Supervisor Edwards:

Colorado Wildlife Federation (CWF), the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), Backcountry Hunters & Anglers and Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership appreciate this opportunity to submit our comment letter on the draft Environmental Assessment (EA) and the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the proposed Thompson Divide Administrative Withdrawal (TDAW) for a 20-year term of 224,713 acres administered by US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, that includes federally managed subsurface lands. Under Preferred Alternative A this acreage will be withdrawn during this term “from all forms of entry, appropriation, and disposal under public land laws, location, entry, and patent under the mining laws, and operation of the mineral leasing, mineral materials, and geothermal leasing laws....” We note that existing leases will be respected.

CWF and NWF, in conjunction with the local communities and a diverse array of interests, have long urged withdrawal. The proposed withdrawal also is consistent for this 20-year term with longstanding widespread support of the CORE ACT bill to gain a permanent solution.

The area features exceptional natural resource values, including some of the last remaining large swaths of ecologically rich and intact mid elevation habitat in Colorado, 20 roadless areas entirely or partially within the withdrawal area, and provides migration routes for wildlife, elk and deer seasonal habitats such as spring calving grounds, native cutthroat trout streams, hunting and fishing (featuring Gold Medal trout waters along the Roaring Fork), and grazing and rangelands that support the local communities. Big game hunting licenses to residents and nonresidents annually direct substantial revenue to Colorado Parks and Wildlife and to local businesses. Further, clean water is essential to the local communities and their agriculture, ranching and recreational pursuits.

The proposed withdrawal has long enjoyed and continues to benefit from widespread, diverse community support. We appreciate the extensive work to generate this proposal and strongly support finalization of preferred Alternative A, and a recommendation to the Secretary of the Interior to expeditiously approve administrative withdrawal of this area.

Sincerely,

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