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Comments: Please accept this public scoping comment letter from the San Miguel County Board of County Commissioners on the proposed Thompson Divide Mineral Withdrawal within the White River National Forest, Grand Mesa Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forest and the Bureau of Land management.

San Miguel County (SMC) has long supported the proposed protections in the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy Act (CORE), including the proposed Thompson Divide Mineral Withdrawal. The provisions to protect public lands in the CORE Act, specifically in the San Juan Mountains, are a result of years of work by SMC, Senator Bennet, Senator Hickenlooper, Governor Polis and Representative Neguse, and hundreds of community members and local businesses.

A mineral withdrawal for the Thompson Divide is another provision of the CORE Act that has broad stakeholder support from around Colorado after years of community and statewide collaboration. Following decades of grassroots advocacy, the Thompson Divide mineral withdrawal is supported by ranchers, hunters, recreationists, and local governments in the region. With an abundance of well-connected wildlife habitat, countless native plant and animal species, and the pristine headwaters of the Roaring Fork River, the Crystal River, and the North Fork of the Gunnison River, the Thompson Divide is an indispensable driver of ecological and economic health in and around the Roaring Fork Valley. Placing 225,000 acres of public lands in a 20-year mineral withdrawal will temporarily protect this essential landscape.

Finally, we ask that the remaining protections of the CORE Act within the Grand Mesa Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests (GMUG) be in the upcoming US Forest Service Forest Plan revision. Specifically in San Miguel County, these designations include additions to the Lizard Head Wilderness Areas, the designation of [ldquo]Special Management Areas[rdquo] designed to protect identified Wilderness characteristics while allowing long-time uses to continue and a small mineral withdrawal. The Sheep Mountain and Liberty Bell East [ldquo]Special Management Areas[rdquo] in the San Juan Mountains Title of the CORE Act were carefully designed to protect these highly valued landscapes while allowing existing non-conforming uses such as heliskiing, and competitive long-distance running race and mountain biking to continue in specific areas. We request this language from the CORE Act to be included in the GMUG Forest Plan, Elevating the protection and management of these unique national forest lands.