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Organization: Town of Crested Butte

Title: Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Supervisor

Comments: The Town of Crested Butte is pleased to see the Notice of Proposed Withdrawal for Thompson Divide published in the federal register on October 17, 2022. This takes lands in our area one step closer to permanent protection from large scale extractive industries, a pursuit our Town has undertaken for the last 4 decades. While this withdrawal does not hold the permanence that a congressional withdrawal may, we are largely supportive of its implementation until a congressional solution can be employed.

We would like to reiterate our desire to engage with the lead agency, which was said to be the GMUG National Forest at the December 14th, 2022, public meeting in Carbondale, as a cooperating agency. The Town of Crested Butte has participated as a cooperating agency on several forest initiatives to help produce positive results both for the agencies and our constituency. The Thompson Divide Mineral Withdrawal will be no different. Our qualification as a special expertise in the planning area under 43 CFR 46.225 would require an invitation by the lead agency and we hope to see one as the NEPA process begins.

The Town has been working diligently with the GMUG leadership, Gunnison County, Mt. Emmons Mining Company (MEMC), and the Crested Butte Land Trust to execute a land exchange, conservation easement, and mineral extinguishment on properties on Mt. Emmons. This exchange is intended to permanently protect this area from large scale mineral extraction and ensure that water treatment facilities can be maintained by MEMC with permanence. The map released in the Federal Register notice for the Proposed Withdrawal for Thompson Divide unfortunately overlaps with federal parcels 2 and 3 of the exchange, theoretically segregating them from disposal by the Forest Service through the land exchange. Town would like to see the Thompson Divide legal description amended to the absolute minimum necessary degree to exclude these parcels so the land exchange can be completed as scheduled. We have attached the legal descriptions of these parcels as an exhibit to this comment letter.

We appreciate the opportunity to continue working with the federal agencies that surround our Township and own most of the land in our primary watershed. We are hopeful that the Proposed Withdrawal for Thompson Divide will be accepted by Secretary Haaland after the NEPA process is complete, allowing us to bridge the gap until a congressional withdrawal can be implemented. The Town of Crested Butte is ready and willing to participate in the withdrawal process and we look forward to doing so.

Attachment: 04_CA Request Town of Crested Butte Comments Thom....pdf