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First name: Dan

Last name: Gibbs

Organization: CO Department of Natural Resources

Title: Executive Director

Comments: RE: Draft Environmental Assessment for the Thompson Divide Withdrawal Project

Dear Deputy Forest Supervisor Edwards

The Colorado Department of Natural Resources (DNR) appreciates the opportunity provided by the United State Forest Service (USFS) to participate in the planning process for the Thompson Divide Mineral Withdrawal. This area has long been valued by Coloradans for the rich and untrammled hunting, fishing, agricultural and recreational opportunities it provides. Colorado DNR appreciates the USFS proactive approach to conserving the area's rich natural resources by initiating a 20-year mineral withdrawal for the area, and we strongly support the USFS proposed preferred alternative (Alternative A). We greatly appreciate the USFS putting in the effort to initiate this withdrawal.

This mineral withdrawal will help maintain the roadless characteristics that this area provides, while also maintaining the integrity of the cold water tributaries which are home to native populations of cutthroat trout. A withdrawal will also maintain intact habitat for a wide range of wildlife species including lynx, elk, mule deer and bear. These lands also host a rich farming and grazing heritage which has existed across this unique landscape for generations.

The proposed conservation measures will help advance the state's biodiversity and climate adaptation goals by maintaining the intactness of the landscape and ensuring resiliency. This proposed mineral withdrawal reflects some of the key conservation components included within the CORE Act which Governor Polis and Colorado DNR have long supported alongside our Congressional delegation.

It is DNR's mission to manage and conserve Colorado's natural resources for the benefit of people today [ndash] and tomorrow. We appreciate the U.S. Forest Service listening to those who have been working diligently for more than a decade to establish new conservation measures for the Thompson Divide area. As proposed, we believe the withdrawal properly reflects the nature of the conversations led by the Thompson Divide coalition, which includes a broad-based collection of interests including ranchers, farmers, hunters, anglers, recreationists, water users, land owners, small business owners, conservationists, and local governments. Through these efforts, the coalition has effectively built widespread community support for protection of the Thompson Divide from oil and gas development. We also believe the USFS has done a good job of ensuring that valid existing mineral rights are honored. Protecting the area from future oil and gas leasing will help safeguard the important cultural, natural, and recreational values.

We again appreciate the USFS initiating this proposed withdrawal and would welcome any additional follow-up conversation regarding our comments - or ways we can help move the preferred alternative forward in an expedited manner. Don't hesitate to reach out directly to Tim Brass at tim.brass@state.co.us or 651-206-4669 to discuss.