



July 11, 2022

Dear Sen. Bennet,

As a Colorado nonprofit corporation whose mission is protecting and enhancing the health and sustainability of wildlife and public lands in the Gunnison Basin, Gunnison Wildlife Association (GWA) thanks you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Gunnison Outdoor Resources Protection Act (GORP).

Colorado's population is growing rapidly. Over the past decade, recreational use on public lands in the Gunnison Basin has substantially increased. With this, the need for greater protection of wildlife and its habitat is stronger than ever.

GWA strongly supports legislation to protect public lands in Gunnison County, including as reflected in GORP's draft legislation. In particular, we value efforts intended to safeguard wildlife, encourage sustainable recreation, and protect the special public lands of the Gunnison Country.

GWA believes that successful public lands protections should come from the communities most impacted, and we commend your efforts over the last decade to work with the Gunnison Public Lands Initiative (GPLI) Working Group on this draft legislation.

While we support the GORP proposal in sum, we are concerned by the provisions within the draft language providing for the potential development of new trails within Wildlife Conservation Areas — including, specifically, the “Gunnison to Crested Butte Trail” in the Flat Top Wildlife Conservation Area; the “Crested Butte to Carbondale Trail” in the Munsey Creek Wildlife Conservation Area; and the “Tenderfoot Mountain to Bambi's Trail” and the “Big Loop Trail” in the Sawtooth Wildlife Conservation Area. These proposed routes, if developed, would fragment key habitat, placing an undue burden on the myriad species the Wildlife Conservation Area status seeks to protect.

Additionally, since GPLI has wrapped up the lion's share of its work, the Gunnison Sage-grouse has remained imperiled as suggested by its “threatened” status under the Endangered Species Act. In fact, the winter of 2019 resulted in a sharp decline in population numbers. Two of the last remaining strongholds for Gunnison Sage-grouse within the Gunnison Basin are Flat Top Mountain and lands south of Gunnison in the vicinity of (if not within) the proposed Sawtooth Wildlife Conservation Area. Any trail development in these areas — including development of

the “Gunnison to Crested Butte Trail,” “Tenderfoot Mountain to Bambi’s Trail” and the “Big Loop Trail” — could further harm a species already on the verge of extinction.

All of this said, we encourage you to continue working hard to honor the diverse, collaborative effort that is GPLI by ensuring that GORP, in its final form, receives the support necessary among your fellow lawmakers to pass it into law.

Gunnison County and its hard-working, stewardship-minded constituents deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cody Dyce", written in a cursive style.

Cody Dyce
President

Gunnison Wildlife Association Board of Directors