

KEN SALAZAR
COLORADO

COMMITTEES:

AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ETHICS

United States Senate

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August 23, 2006

Honorable Craig J. Meis
Honorable Tilman M. Bishop
Honorable Janet Rowland
Mesa County Commissioners
P.O. Box 20000
Grand Junction, CO 81502-5010

Honorable Lela J. McCracken
Honorable Wayne E. Wolf
Honorable R. Olen Lund
Delta County Commissioners
501 Palmer, Suite 227
Delta, CO 81416-1764

Honorable Bill Patterson
Honorable Alan Belt
Honorable David A. Ubell
Montrose County Commissioners
161 South Townsend
Montrose, CO 81401

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing to offer my support for efforts to improve the management of the natural, cultural, and recreational resources in the Lower Gunnison.

The lands west of Delta and Montrose, and south of Grand Junction, including Dominguez and Escalante Canyons, Cactus Park, and tens of thousands of acres managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service, are a crown jewel of Western Colorado. They include pristine mesas and roaring streams, scenic trails, roads for recreation, fish and wildlife, and the priceless cultural resources of native peoples. We all share an interest in protecting these resources through sound, balanced management practices and policies.

The demands on these lands will continue to grow over the next several decades and beyond. To prepare for this, it is important that the vision of the local communities and key stakeholders are integrated into a long-term management strategy that protects continued multiple use recreation, the existing ranching economy, and the extraordinary natural and cultural resources that make these lands unique.

I applaud you and the other local leaders who have initiated a discussion on the future for the area. I would like to offer my assistance in continuing this discussion that will create a long-term management strategy for the Lower Gunnison.

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Specifically, I would like to suggest that we create a public process to consider the possibility of creating a National Conservation Area (NCA) for the Dominguez and Escalante area. Congress designates an NCA when it wants to ensure the permanent management of lands for multiple uses and for resource protection. An NCA designation would place this area within the BLM-managed National Landscape Conservation System, which receives a greater share of resources and funding for recreation and resource protection than other BLM lands.

Depending on how the management plan is written, National Conservation Areas can include grazing lands, cultural sites, areas for multiple use recreation -- including OHVs, hiking, biking, camping and climbing -- and wilderness. The McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area, west of Grand Junction, and the Gunnison Gorge NCA, between Delta and Montrose, are models that communities have used to address similar challenges.

Local support and public input are essential to the success of a management designation like an NCA. For this reason, I would like to provide assistance in creating a locally-driven public process that would help determine whether a National Conservation Area designation might be appropriate for this area.

I look forward to working with you to ensure the continued protection and enjoyment of the resources of the Lower Gunnison.

Sincerely,



Ken Salazar
United States Senator