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February 9, 2017

Senator Cory Gardner
1125 17th Street, Suite 525
Denver, CO 80202

Dear Senator Gardner,

Next week, the United States Senate will vote on H.J. Res 44, to overturn Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) new land use planning rule, "Planning 2.0", established in 2016. Wild Connections opposes this resolution and we urge you to vote against an effort that will reduce agency transparency, limit the amount of input that the public has on their public lands, and lose strong management designations for wildlife and ecological biodiversity. Wild Connections is an organization that has been promoting landscape connectivity on a watershed and ecoregion-wide basis for over 20 years and which has been actively involved in the management plan revision for the BLM's Royal Gorge Field Office, which is currently under way. As a locally based conservation organization, we believe that it is important for citizens to have opportunities to work with the BLM to decide future management for these millions of acres of public land. Planning 2.0 is a step in the right direction.

BLM's Planning 2.0 makes BLM land use management planning more collaborative and transparent. It offers more and new opportunities for stakeholders to get involved, including local governments, Indian tribes, and the general public. Planning 2.0 engages the public earlier in the land management planning process leading to more input into the process, enabling the BLM with the best available information at the onset of the planning process. More and earlier public involvement will not only broaden the scope of the plan, but will likely reduce litigation after the plan is enacted.

This new planning rule is also important for fish and wildlife habitat. Migration corridors and intact habitats are identified early in the planning process so that these important areas can be managed and conserved as the agency makes decisions about development, recreation and other public land uses. Hunters and anglers support Planning 2.0 as the rule offers wildlife corridors as a management designation, for a key type of wildlife habitat or an area of ecological importance.

As you know, the BLM's ongoing Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan Revision has incorporated parts of the Planning 2.0 planning rule. Wild Connections and our members have benefited from the "envisioning meetings" in 6 towns and cities within the planning area, offering the public opportunities to voice their concerns and comments in preparation for the full planning effort. The BLM has received positive comments from a diverse voice of users,

including outfitters, horse-packers, grazing lessees, environmental organizations, wildlife groups, hunters, anglers, snowmobilers, off-highway vehicle users, and mining claimants.

If H.J. Res 44 is passed, the BLM would return to its long-outdated planning rule, which was established in 1983. Of additional concern is that the Congressional Review Act prohibits the agency from writing a new rule that is “substantially the same” without additional legislative action. Thus many important aspects of Planning 2.0 would be precluded from being enacted indefinitely in the reformulation of the rule.

We strongly urge you to work with the new administration to make refinements to this planning process that many stakeholders have championed. Please vote against H. J. Res 44 so that we do not lose these important BLM planning aspects that were just carefully constructed under Planning 2.0.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James E. Lockhart". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

James E. Lockhart, President
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