

Doug Vilsack, Colorado State Director
Bureau of Land Management Colorado
2850 Youngfield St,
Lakewood, CO 80215

January 26, 2023

Dear Mr. Vilsack,

We are writing to provide a Wilderness Study Area expansion proposal for the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan (ECRMP), as the Royal Gorge Field Office (RGFO) works towards a final management plan for the area. Over the past decade, our organizations have engaged in the public process for land use planning and other federal activities within the RGFO.

BLM has the authority and obligation to inventory and protect wilderness-quality lands through land use planning processes and in accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA).

Attached is our Wilderness Study Area (WSA) expansion proposal for BLM's High Mesa Grassland, located just north of the Arkansas River in Bighorn Sheep Canyon, about 11 miles west of the City of Cañon City. As outlined throughout our proposal, the High Mesa Grassland proposed expansion meets all of the qualifications under FLPMA. The BLM has recognized this area for its Lands with Wilderness Character (LWC), and it has been proposed numerous times as Wilderness under the Colorado Wilderness Act. Additionally, expanding this WSA will help protect regional climate refugia areas, in line with state and national goals of conserving 30% of the nation's lands and waters by 2030.

We urge the BLM to consider the designation of new WSAs in Colorado as a key tool for BLM to protect wilderness-quality and undisturbed public lands through collaborative land use planning processes. Thank you for considering this proposal.

Sincerely,

John Sztukowski, Conservation Director

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