

July 11, 2022

The Honorable Michael Bennet
261 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Support for Dolores River Canyon National Conservation Area Legislation

Dear Senator Bennet:

We the undersigned organizations are writing to express our support for your legislation to establish a Dolores River National Conservation Area (NCA) and Dolores River Special Management Area below McPhee Reservoir in Southwest Colorado. We have communicated often with your office over past years, and two of our groups have been participants on the Lower Dolores Working Group and the Legislative Subcommittee, which was tasked in 2011 with crafting a set of legislative recommendations for broader consideration. After more than a decade of dialogue, compromise, and multiple iterations of the proposal, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, three county commissions, and numerous other stakeholders have supported the proposal and asked you to introduce legislation. Thank you for carrying this work forward by introducing this bill.

The natural and cultural values of the Dolores River Canyon landscape are well known and beloved by many. Native Nations have called the Dolores River Canyon and surrounding areas home for millennia. Its stunning geology, with soaring sandstone cliffs and entrenched goosenecks rival any landscape in the greater Southwest region. Old growth Ponderosa groves and a unique aquatic ecosystem invite exploration and research. Native fish species, including several who are considered sensitive species by the State of Colorado and the Bureau of Land Management, depend upon Dolores River habitat for spawning and growth. Hiking, mountain biking, fishing, birding, and rock-climbing opportunities are plentiful. Extending more than 175 miles, the Dolores River is important for wildlife migration and habitat, and also provides some of the West's finest river running experiences. Long-term conservation solutions for this area will protect the natural values as well other cultural and historical uses of the lands for generations to come.

Finding solutions for Dolores River issues has been a complicated endeavor, and this legislation addresses many challenges. The Lower Dolores Working Group and the Legislative Subcommittee consisted of many diverse stakeholders who, throughout the nearly 15 years of discussions, maintained a keen sense of respect for one another's values and perspectives, and brought in sound science to inform the dialogue. Your legislation accurately reflects the recommendations from these years of committed work. We commend you for that and thank

you for incorporating some of the suggestions we made on the draft legislation that are critical for our collective support.

We wish to express our strong support for your Dolores River legislation, pledge to work with you to move it through the congressional process, and look forward to seeing the Dolores River and its canyon landscape protected permanently.

Sincerely,



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