



SOUTHERN UTE INDIAN TRIBE

April 22, 2026

The Honorable Michael Bennet
261 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Sale of Public Lands

Dear Senator Bennet;

This letter is to express the Southern Ute Indian Tribe's support of your legislation limiting the sale of public lands through the budget reconciliation process by amending the Congressional Budget Act. That amendment would designate the sale of public lands as "extraneous" to the budget process, requiring a three-fifths vote of the Senate for approval.

Last year, as part of its budget reconciliation process, the Senate considered a proposal requiring the sale of up to 3 million acres of public lands held by the United States Forest Service ("USFS") and Bureau of Land Management ("BLM") in eleven western states. This proposal placed approximately 3.5 million acres of public lands in the State of Colorado in danger of being sold. In proposing this legislation, no consideration was given to the fact that many of these lands are subject to Tribal Treaty rights with the federal government, including lands wherein the Southern Ute Indian Tribe retains federally protected Treaty rights.

The Ute people are the original inhabitants of what is today the State of Colorado, having inhabited the area since time immemorial. The Confederated Bands of the Utes signed a treaty with the United States in 1868. That Treaty guaranteed to the Utes approximately the western third of what is now the State of Colorado - nearly 15 million acres of land that was "set apart for the absolute and undisturbed use and occupation of the Indians."

Despite these guarantees, the federal government often breached treaties with Tribes shortly after they were signed. That was true of the Treaty of 1868. The discovery of valuable hard-rock minerals in the San Juan Mountains led to widespread trespass on the Ute lands. In 1873, Felix R. Brunot, then Chairman of the Board of the Indian Commissioners, through deceit, negotiated the cession of approximately 3.7 million acres of the Ute treaty lands. Nevertheless, the Ute Bands reserved the right to hunt, fish, and gather on those ceded lands. Today, those rights are protected by federal law.¹

¹ 18 Stat. 35, Act of April 29, 1874.

Public lands throughout the United States should never be sold simply to reconcile the federal budget. Nor should they be sold in violation of the federal government's Treaty obligations to Tribes.

We appreciate the opportunity to work with you on this important legislation to ensure the protection of public lands and respect for federally protected Treaty rights. Please reach out to David Smith, our Legal Director, [at dasmith@southernute-nsn.gov](mailto:dasmith@southernute-nsn.gov) with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melvin J. Baker". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue horizontal line.

Melvin J. Baker, Chairman
Southern Ute Indian Tribe

Copy: Hon. John Hickenlooper, United States Senate
Hon. Jeff Hurd, House of Representatives



General Assembly
State of Colorado
Denver

April 29, 2026

Michael Bennet
U.S. Senator for Colorado
261 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

To Senator Michael Bennet:

We write to express our support for the Public Lands Integrity Act.

Coloradans recognize the importance of our federal public lands to our state's history, environment, culture, economy, and way of life. Last year, the Colorado legislature passed a resolution opposing efforts to sell, transfer, or dispose of our national public lands, with near-unanimous support. We were dismayed to see an effort to sell up to 3 million acres of public lands included in the One Big Beautiful Bill later that year, and we are grateful to Colorado's delegation for helping to strike these provisions.

Our state's federal public lands drive our economy through outdoor recreation, tourism, hunting, agriculture, and other industries. Colorado alone is home to over 22 million acres of federal lands, which generate tens of billions of dollars in economic activity across these sectors. Our lands are also the foundation of Colorado's identity: they are where Coloradans hike, hunt, fish, camp, graze, and recreate. Congressional decisions to transfer ownership of federal public lands must be made carefully, with the opportunity for public engagement and local input. To do otherwise undermines our state's heritage and way of life.

Federal public lands exist to permanently serve the public interest, not to temporarily pad Congress's bottom line. They should not be put up for sale when Washington lawmakers cannot otherwise make ends meet in large budget bills. Once the government sells off public lands, they are gone forever. Congress should not have the ability to permanently remove public lands from public ownership without public transparency and input.

Your Public Lands Integrity Act ensures that the type of effort to sell public lands that we saw last year never happens again. Reconciliation, which uses expedited procedures to pass legislation with a simple majority vote in the Senate, is the wrong venue to discuss decisions about public lands that will affect our children and grandchildren. Well-considered, small transfers and exchanges with community support and serving the public benefit will still have the opportunity to move forward through existing administrative tools and regular legislative order.

Once again, we express our support for this legislation and offer our gratitude for your efforts to protect our Colorado's public lands for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Julie McCluskie
Speaker of the House
House District 13

Monica Duran
Majority Leader
House District 23

Jennifer Bacon
Assistant Majority Leader
House District 7

Carlos Barron
State Representative
House District 48

Elizabeth Velasco
State Representative
House District 57

Emily Sirota
State Representative
House District 9

Steven Woodrow
State Representative
House District 2

Eliza Hamrick
State Representative
House District 61

Rick Taggart
State Representative
House District 55

Andrew Boesenecker
Speaker Pro Tempore
House District 53

Cathy Kipp
President Pro Tempore
Senate District 14

Meghan Lukens
State Representative
House District 26

Amy Paschal
State Representative
House District 18

Chad Clifford
State Representative
House District 37

Jamie Jackson
State Representative
House District 41

Lesley Smith
State Representative
House District 49

Gretchen Rydin
State Representative
House District 38

Katie Stewart
State Representative
House District 59

Jacque Phillips
State Representative
House District 31

Brianna Titone
State Representative
House District 27

Lindsay Gilchrist
State Representative
House District 8

Manny Rutinel
State Representative
House District 32

Sean Camacho
State Representative
House District 6

Lorena Garcia
State Representative
House District 35

Marc Snyder
State Senator
Senate District 12

Dylan Roberts
State Senator
Senate District 8

Mike Weissman
State Senator
Senate District 28

Kenny Nguyen
State Representative
House District 33

Karen McCormick
State Representative
House District 11

Mandy Lindsay
State Representative
House District 42

Tisha Mauro
State Representative
House District 46

Sheila Lieder
State Representative
House District 28

Lori Goldstein
State Representative
House District 29

Jeff Bridges
State Senator
Senate District 26

Judy Amabile
State Senator
Senate District 18

Julie Gonzales
State Senator
Senate District 34

Adrienne Benavidez
State Senator
Senate District 21

Janice Marchman
State Senator
Senate District 15