



# **The Mountain Pact**

Tuesday, May 23, 2023

Doug Vilsack, State Director  
Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Colorado State Office  
2850 Youngfield St.  
Lakewood, Colorado 80215

Dear State Director Vilsack,

Colorado's public lands are deeply valued by its people because they provide important [health and economic benefits](#). [The 8.3 million acres of federal public lands within Colorado that are overseen by the Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\)](#) are particularly important. These lands support a diverse array of outdoor recreation activities and create jobs through the tourism sector that are the backbone of many of our communities. They also provide important wildlife habitat and corridors, which are integral to an [intact ecosystem that make it easier for species to adapt](#) to climate change.

As local elected officials in Colorado, we would like to express our commitment to protecting these landscapes which provide so much to our communities. We commend BLM on recent agency guidance that prioritizes the health of public lands and encourage the BLM to continue to place conservation at the forefront of the rulemaking that will occur in 2023.

These incredible public lands represent just a sliver of the many places within the BLM lands in Colorado that need to be protected. This is why we were excited to see that [rules for the designation of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern \(ACEC\)](#) have been clarified so that this type of designation may be prioritized during land use planning processes. The designation of ACECs is an important step in [ensuring critical ecosystems within our public lands are protected](#), since they can help at-risk and endangered species recover, help clean watersheds, and preserve Indigenous culture.

Interconnected landscapes that allow species to reach new habitat areas is another important aspect of preserving ecosystems. We would therefore also like to express our appreciation for the [BLM's recent guidance related to Habitat Connectivity on Public Lands](#).

As the ancestral home of many Indigenous communities, Colorado's public lands can especially benefit from management that incorporates the knowledge and perspectives of native Tribes. Because of this, we support the [BLM's commitment to incorporate co-stewardship between the federal and tribal governments into the management practices overseeing these lands](#). We believe that this is not only good for the conservation and sustainability of Colorado landscapes, but will also benefit our communities by bringing more, underrepresented voices to the table.

Finally, in addition to the conservation efforts we've highlighted above, we also strongly encourage the BLM to use other existing tools to protect public lands across the state. In particular, we call your attention to designating new Wilderness

Study Areas (WSAs). The BLM has the authority to ensure that lands with wilderness character are administratively protected as WSAs. These areas are often the first to be identified by our congressional leaders for legislative designation as wilderness and for many of our communities these are the iconic landscapes that define our state.

The BLM's [mission](#) is "to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations." For years BLM has prioritized extractive uses like oil and gas development while largely overlooking sustaining the health and diversity of BLM lands.

As 2023 progresses, we look forward to the BLM prioritizing the conservation of our shared public lands. With this in mind, we strongly encourage that the BLM rulemaking emphasizes ecological integrity, preservation of vulnerable resources, and maintaining access to outdoor recreation. These efforts at the national level will positively impact BLM lands in our communities and across Colorado.

Sincerely,

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