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April 22, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

On behalf of the tens of thousands of Coloradans we represent as legislators, we want to express our appreciation to the Bureau of Land Management's engagement with local Colorado communities in the Uncompahgre Field Office Resource Management Plan revision process. Unfortunately, the final plan, released on April 17, 2020 is a clear reflection of the energy-dominant priorities in Washington DC and not of the locally impacted communities of Western Colorado. We are particularly concerned the plan will cause irreparable harm to the communities of the North Fork Valley. We, therefore, request that you withdraw the Record of Decision and re-engage with local communities to develop a revised plan that includes strong protections for the lands, air, water, and wildlife that power the resilient local economy of the North Fork Valley.

Western Colorado's North Fork Valley, within the Gunnison River watershed, is a stunning valley, which contains vital resources to the State of Colorado, including farming, ranching and mining industries, dating back to the 19th century. The North Fork Valley is a hub of organic agriculture and is one of only two federally recognized wine-making regions in Colorado. The North Fork's scenic features, wild public lands, rural communities, native wildlife, and bucolic appeal are critical components of the area's existing and emerging economy. With the decline of the coal industry, the community has spent extensive time in broad stakeholding processes to determine what supports its future. We want a plan that safeguards these incredible assets that will be the economic engine for generations to come.

The North Fork Valley represents a model for rural communities transitioning away from fossil-fuel-based industries and towards a more diversified economy built upon its natural resources. Historically a coal-mining community, the closure of two of three local coal mines cost the area 600 coal jobs within the last five years. The North Fork Valley re-imagined itself into a thriving agricultural, recreational, and tourism-centric hub. Diverse industries such as agro-tourism, family farms and ranches, clean and renewable energy, home and internet-based businesses, and outdoor recreation power a local and sustainable future for the area. We want a plan that protects this emerging and growing economic future.

The BLM's plan for the area opens the entirety of the North Fork Valley up to oil and gas development. Oil and gas development will cause significant, negative impacts to the North Fork Valley's public lands and could impact many other natural resources, including community water, irrigation

supplies, and public infrastructure. While oil and gas development may be appropriate elsewhere, these communities, and their economic future, depend on moving away from non-renewable energy development. We ask that you respect the hard work they have done to build consensus around a long-term plan to have a diversified economy.

The passage of Senate Bill 19-181 last year by the Colorado General Assembly signals the state's priorities for the protection of public health, safety, welfare, the environment, and wildlife relative to oil and gas development. A hallmark of that state legislation is support of "local control." We continue to believe that locals know what is best when it comes to developing master plans for their communities and we ask you to show that same deference to the communities of the North Fork Valley.

In failing to protect our communities and the land, water, and wildlife they depend on, the BLM's plan for the North Fork Valley ignores local input in land management decisions. We find this troubling at a time when the agency is relocating its headquarters to Grand Junction, a move that was purportedly meant to increase local input into planning processes. Instead, recently released documents show that local input in the Uncompahgre plan was deliberately overruled by agency leadership, despite overwhelming public support for increased restrictions on oil and gas leasing and development. For example, the local community developed the North Fork Alternative Plan, which set forth a locally grown vision and set of guidelines for a balanced approach to oil and gas management in the North Fork Valley. The BLM considered the community alternative in the RMP but then dismissed it in the final plan.

We, Colorado's elected leaders, want to see protection for the North Fork Valley's natural resources, public lands, and rural economies that reflect local solutions, not beltway politics. We do not see this in the BLM's Resource Management Plan for the North Fork Valley. The plan is drastically out of step with the plan the local community has for its future. The BLM fails to support a sustainable rural economy on Colorado's Western Slope. We, therefore, request that you withdraw the Record of Decision and re-engage with local communities to develop a revised plan that reflects the long-term strategy of the communities most impacted and request that it includes strong protections for the lands, air, water, and wildlife that power the resilient local economy of the North Fork Valley. We furthermore request that the BLM does not proceed with any new oil and gas leasing in the North Fork Valley until a new plan is put in place that adequately protects our communities and resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "KED", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Sen. Kerry Donovan
Senate District 5
State of Colorado

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julie McCluskie", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Rep. Julie McCluskie
House District 61
State of Colorado