

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

The Honorable Cory Gardner  
354 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Scott Tipton  
218 Cannon HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Joe Neguse  
1419 Longworth HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

March 31, 2019

Dear Senator Bennet, Senator Gardner, Representative Tipton, and Representative Neguse:

As elected leaders of seven counties that are home to public lands that would be protected for our world-class recreation, wildlife, watersheds, wilderness, scenic, historic, and ecosystem values by the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act, we were very disappointed to read the 11<sup>th</sup> hour letter from the Intermountain Forest Association (IFA) dated March 18, 2019.

We have worked closely with the communities in our counties for many years to develop the individual designations included in the CORE Act. Those years of effort included close and detailed collaboration with land managers, homeowners and forest and fire experts. The result is a balanced proposal that not only has broad and deep support within our counties, but also will help advance the recreation, conservation and cultural values that are essential to the well-being of our economies and communities.

Presumably referencing the proposed protections in Title I of the bill, IFA's letter incorrectly states that the CORE Act would reduce the number of acres identified as suitable timber available for forest management by approximately 8,000 acres. The truth is that less than a third as many acres would fall into that category, and those acres are proposed as Wilderness—because land managers and local communities agree that natural processes should be prioritized to protect economic and environmental values. The lands within the proposed special management areas are available for a range of forest management activities that would be consistent with the central purposes for which they are proposed to be established. In many cases boundaries were adjusted to ensure all methods of wildfire mitigation.

This year, Summit County will be contributing approximately \$500,000 to the USFS to pay contractors to complete timber cutting projects in the 10 Mile Recreation Management Area included in the CORE Act, in order to complete fire mitigation projects. The USFS lacks adequate funds to pay contractors to complete this work. The timber will be stacked and burned or chipped because it has NO COMMERCIAL VALUE. This is the largest identified "suitable base" in Summit County and contractors need to be subsidized with local dollars to enter into mitigation contracts. The CORE Act specifically allows for forest management in this area.

Perhaps more important than having an accurate understanding of the proposal and the facts, we are concerned that the IFA letter evidences a clear lack of understanding of our counties, our

values, and our interests. To be clear, there are special public lands in our counties that we strongly believe should be managed for values other than commercial logging.

The 2002 White River National Forest Plan was intended to be followed for 10 to 15 years. It recognized that outdoor recreation was the primary use of the forest and projected that recreational demand on the forest would continue to grow. Indeed, between 2007 and 2017, visitation to the White River increased by more than 55%, and it is expected to continue to grow into the future. In 2018, the value of timber cut from the White River National Forest amounted to \$43,108. The dynamics in the San Juan and Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests are similar.

On the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison National Forest county officials, USFS staff, stakeholders and the timber industry worked diligently for two years to develop the Spruce Beetle Epidemic Aspen Decline Management Response (SBEADMR). The USFS SBEADMR Record of Decision is now a ten-year timber management program that has established a sustainable supply of harvest for the local timber industry. The CORE Act would not affect this program.

We value the services that the timber industry provides to our communities and we continue to support many activities that benefit IFA's members working in our communities. In fact, lately we have worked to ensure that planned State highway closures on Highway 50, will not restrict delivery of timber to the Montrose Mill. We support the role of ecologically-sound forestry and hazardous fuels reduction, fire management, community protection, and economic development. The CORE Act was developed with a mutual understanding of our public forest lands and their many values—values (and dispersed revenues) that in some cases outweigh the commercial value of timber. In short, not every acre of timber that could be logged, should be logged. There are places that are appropriate for commercial timber harvest and there are places where natural processes should be allowed to dominate. The financial interests of one industry are not the equivalent of the public interest, and the latter should be the touchstone for the management of our national forests.

We are all dedicated to continued collaboration with our local logging businesses to ensure a sustainable supply of timber so that they are able to actively participate in the stewardship of our forests. We ask that you consider the importance of the many values of our forests and our counties' priorities when it comes to the balanced management of public lands in our counties.

We hope you will consider our views—as well as the informed and overwhelming support from businesses, elected officials, and organizations across the state—as the CORE Act advances.

Sincerely,  
Karn Stiegelmeier, Summit County Commissioner  
Ben Tisdell, Ouray County Commissioner  
Kathy Chandler Henry, Eagle County Commissioner  
Greg Poschman, Pitkin County Commissioner  
Jonathan Houck, Gunnison County Commissioner  
Hilary Cooper, San Miguel County Commissioner

Scott Fetchenier, San Juan County Commissioner

Cc: Molly Pitts, Colorado Programs Manager, Intermountain Forest Association  
Ben Wudtke, Executive Director, Intermountain Forest Association