

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 20, 2016

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Secretary Vilsack,

We encourage the completion of the environmental analysis resulting from a June 2014 court ruling on the Colorado Roadless Rule (“the Rule”), and the reinstatement of the North Fork Exception to the Rule at the earliest possible opportunity. The Rule, finalized in July 2012, provided for an exception in the North Fork Coal Mining Area that would allow the construction of temporary roads to facilitate the continued underground mining of coal resources. These temporary roads would not be available for general public use, and would be reclaimed to their natural state after fulfilling their purpose.

The Rule was the result of many years of negotiation and collaboration among the United States Forest Service (USFS), the State of Colorado, and local communities and stakeholders, and it recognized the importance of coal mining in the North Fork Valley. The commonsense exception measure was designed to foster continued resource development while retaining strong environmental protections.

However, in a June 2014 court ruling, the exception was vacated pending further environmental analysis. On April 7, 2015, the USFS published its Notice of Intent to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) to reinstate the North Fork Coal Mining Area Exception to the Colorado Roadless Rule, and published the Draft SEIS on November 20, 2015 for a public comment period ending January 15, 2016.

We thank the USFS for its work on this issue to date, because these coal resources are not merely an important component of the state’s energy portfolio; mining has been ingrained in the very history and culture of the North Fork Valley. The industry has supported generations of families in Delta and Gunnison Counties, and remains critical to the prosperity of the region’s communities. It is urgent that any unnecessary barriers to the long-term vitality of the region’s coal industry, and by relation the economic health of these communities, be removed as soon as possible.

We thank you for your time and serious consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully,



Cory Gardner
United States Senator



Scott Tipton
Member of Congress



Mike Coffman
Member of Congress



Doug Lamborn
Member of Congress



Ken Buck
Member of Congress

Cc: The Honorable John Hickenlooper, Governor, State of Colorado
Mr. Tom Tidwell, Chief, U.S. Forest Service
Mr. Dan Jirón, Regional Forester, Region 2
Mr. Scott Armentrout, Forest Supervisor, Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison
National Forests
Board of County Commissioners, Delta County, Colorado
Board of County Commissioners, Gunnison County, Colorado