

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

REGULAR MEETING DATE: June 24, 2015

AGENDA ITEM TITLE: Resolution Of The Board Of County Commissioners Of Pitkin County, Colorado, Stating The Value Of Public Lands To Pitkin County's Economy, Recreation, Heritage, And Quality Of Life, And Supporting Continued Federal Ownership Of Federal Public Lands

STAFF RESPONSIBLE: Ellen Sassano, Senior Long Range Planner

ISSUE STATEMENT: At the request of the Board of County Commissioners, Staff has prepared the attached draft resolution (Attachment A,) expressing the Board's support for continued federal ownership of federal public lands. Staff seeks Board approval of the resolution as drafted, or direction for modification prior to signature by the BOCC Chairman. Upon approval, the resolution will be forwarded to our congressional representatives in Washington, D.C.

BACKGROUND: There is a national movement to transfer ownership of federal public lands to states. One of the more publicized initiatives is sponsored by the Utah-based organization, the *American Lands Council*. Pitkin County recently sent the Colorado Senate Agriculture Committee a letter opposing a proposed senate bill to form a committee to begin studying such actions in Colorado. While the issue died in the most recent Colorado legislative session, the U.S. Senate has approved federal monies to facilitate such transfers, and there is a new Senate Caucus/Coalition that has been formally constituted at the federal level to promote the cause. Colorado counties that oppose such action, including La Plata and San Juan counties, are mobilizing, and have requested that Pitkin County draft a resolution to state its opposition. The attached draft resolution identifies concerns unique to Pitkin County, but also draws from resolutions prepared by San Juan and La Plata Counties to show consensus amongst jurisdictions. The Pitkin County resolution also reflects sentiment expressed in the Pitkin County Open Space & Trails Land Exchange policy.

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN: This item relates to the Core Focus categories of Flourishing Natural & Built Environment and Prosperous Economy.

KEY DISCUSSION ITEMS: Staff recommends the following two topics for discussion:

1. Does the attached resolution adequately identify Board concerns regarding the transfer of federal lands out of federal ownership?
2. Resolution Paragraph #17 includes a qualifying statement providing an exception to the transfer of federal public lands, where "rare circumstances may warrant the limited transfer of federal public lands under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act." This qualifier was

added to address truly small scale exchanges such as the one between Pitkin County and BLM to obtain the Hunter Creek Trailhead. Is this stated exception acceptable to the Board?

BUDGETARY IMPACT: N/A

RECOMMENDED BOCC ACTION: Approve the Resolution for Board Chair signature, and direct Staff to send it to our congressional representatives in Washington, D.C., with copies sent to partnering counties, agencies and non-governmental organizations that may have an interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS:

- A** Draft Pitkin County Resolution
- B** La Plata County Resolution

RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF PITKIN COUNTY, COLORADO, STATING THE VALUE OF PUBLIC LANDS TO PITKIN COUNTY'S ECONOMY, RECREATION, HERITAGE, AND QUALITY OF LIFE, AND SUPPORTING CONTINUED FEDERAL OWNERSHIP OF FEDERAL PUBLIC LANDS

Resolution No.____-2015

RECITALS

1. Pitkin County contains a unique wealth of scenic and wild natural landscapes, including mountains, rivers, forests, lakes, basins and plateaus, many of which lie within public lands owned equally by all Americans.
2. Federal public lands comprise some 83% of Pitkin County and create the mosaic of extraordinary scenery, habitat, recreation and natural resources that are of immeasurable value to the health, welfare and enjoyment of Pitkin County's residents and visitors.
3. These federally administered public lands are essential to the quality of life in Pitkin County, providing extensive public recreational opportunities for wildlife watching, hiking, hunting, fishing, backpacking, horseback riding, skiing, bicycling, sightseeing, and numerous other outdoor recreational activities; thereby improving the health of our community and its visitors.
4. These same federally administered public lands provide essential habitat for fish and wildlife.
5. Fish and wildlife and the exceptionally scenic landscapes of Pitkin County's federal public lands attract the outdoor recreation and tourism that are the dominant drivers of Pitkin County's thriving tourist economy.
6. Federally administered public lands contain headwaters that provide clean water for municipal water supplies, fisheries and ranching integral to the County's economy, quality of life and public welfare.
7. Forests within these federally managed lands function as carbon storage critical to climate health.
8. Pitkin County's attraction to businesses, employers, quality employees, and the tourists who are a significant component of our economy overwhelmingly flows from the high quality of life arising out of the expansive wild landscapes and outdoor recreational opportunities available on surrounding federally managed public lands.
9. Federal public land management agencies directly and indirectly employ full-time residents of Pitkin County, contributing to the fiscal and social fabric of the

community.

10. Owing to drought and insect infestations, forests in Pitkin County are increasingly prone to wildfire, including periodic large-scale fires.
11. Federal money, manpower, aircraft and other specialized fire prevention and firefighting assets essential to protecting our communities, infrastructure and public lands are unavailable at the state and county levels.
12. Management of federally administered public lands by the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Bureau of Land Management in compliance with federal law best protects the national value and utility of the public lands for all Americans and the values on which the economy in Pitkin County are dependent.
13. Management of federal public lands in compliance with federal law provides for collaboration with state and local agencies, and the community at large, that is more likely to produce effective landscape-wide management than proposals to transfer federal lands out of federal ownership.
14. Any loss of these public lands or of public access thereto would have damaging consequences for Pitkin County's economy and the well-being of its residents and visitors.
15. Pitkin County created an Open Space & Trails Program in 1990 and has invested more than \$82 million over the past twenty years to secure over 18,700 acres of additional conserved private lands for the benefit of Pitkin County's residents and visitors.
16. Pitkin County has also gone to great lengths to ensure that appropriate rights of access to federal lands remain open to the public.
17. Recognizing that rare circumstances may warrant the limited transfer of federal public lands under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act, Pitkin County nonetheless believes that transfer of Federal lands within Pitkin County out of federal ownership will harm the health and welfare of Pitkin County residents and visitors, and undermine the value of Pitkin County's ongoing investment in its Open Space and Trails Program.
18. Pitkin County's citizens, and Americans throughout the country use federal public lands across the United States, and value them as a distinctly prideful part of our national heritage and a legacy for future generations, no matter in which state we live.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Commissioners of Pitkin County, Colorado, that:

1. The Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners strongly supports continued federal land ownership and management in Pitkin County, and the irreplaceable value these

public lands bring to our county's economy, recreation, heritage, and quality of life.

2. The Pitkin County Board of County Commissioners commends the dedicated federal employees who manage America's public lands in Pitkin County, as well as the dedicated employees of the State of Colorado who manage fish, wildlife and forests in Pitkin County, in partnership with the federal public land managers and local officials.

APPROVED AND ADOPTED this 24th of June, 2015.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF PITKIN COUNTY, COLORADO

By _____
Steven F. Child, Chairman

Date _____

ATTEST:

Jeanette Jones, Clerk to the BOCC

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

APPROVED AS TO CONTENT:

John Ely, County Attorney

Cindy Houben,
Community Development Director

RESOLUTION NUMBER 2015-18

RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF LA PLATA COUNTY, COLORADO, STATING THE VALUE OF PUBLIC LANDS TO LA PLATA COUNTY'S ECONOMY, RECREATION, HERITAGE AND QUALITY OF LIFE AND SUPPORTING CONTINUED FEDERAL OWNERSHIP OF FEDERAL PUBLIC LANDS

WHEREAS, La Plata County includes a unique wealth of scenic and wild natural landscapes, including mountains, rivers, forests, lakes, basins and plateaus; and

WHEREAS, most such natural landscapes within the county are federal public lands owned equally by all Americans; and

WHEREAS, public lands under the management of the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management comprise more than 38% of the land surface of La Plata County; and

WHEREAS, these federally administered public lands are essential to the quality of life in La Plata County, providing extensive public recreational opportunities for wildlife watching, hiking, hunting, fishing, backpacking, horseback riding, skiing, bicycling, sightseeing, and numerous other outdoor recreational activities, thereby improving the health of our community and its visitors; and

WHEREAS, these same federally administered public lands provide essential habitat for fish and wildlife; and

WHEREAS, fish and wildlife and the exceptionally scenic landscapes of La Plata County's federal public lands attract the outdoor recreation and tourism that are the dominant drivers of La Plata County's thriving tourist economy; and

WHEREAS, the unified, experienced and consistent management of federally administered public lands by the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Bureau of Land Management across the nation best protects the national value and utility of the public lands for all Americans and the values on which the economy in La Plata County are dependent; and

WHEREAS, La Plata County's attraction to businesses, employers, quality employees, and the tourists who are a significant component of our economy overwhelmingly owes to the high quality of life arising from the expansive wild landscapes and outdoor recreational opportunities available on surrounding federally managed public lands; and

WHEREAS, La Plata County's agricultural industry has traditionally relied heavily on public-lands grazing of sheep and cattle; and

WHEREAS, we believe that management of our federal public lands and wildlife via long-established collaborative approaches in which federal public land management agencies cooperate with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Colorado State Forest Service, La Plata County officials, and the community are more likely to produce effective landscape-wide management than would ownership or management of federal public lands by the state of Colorado; and

WHEREAS, La Plata County residents actively collaborate among diverse interests and with public land managers to improve equitable public land management and public access, as evidenced by the broad-based coalition that forged the successful Hermosa Creek Watershed Protection Act; and

WHEREAS, federal public land management agencies directly and indirectly employ many full-time residents of La Plata County, contributing significantly to the fiscal and social health of the county; and

WHEREAS, Americans throughout the country value federal public lands as a distinctly prideful part of our national heritage, no matter in which state we live; and

WHEREAS, owing to ongoing drought and insect infestations, forests in La Plata County are increasingly prone to wildfire, including periodic large-scale fires such as the Missionary Ridge conflagration of 2002; and

WHEREAS, federal money, manpower, aircraft and other specialized fire prevention and firefighting assets essential to protecting our communities, infrastructure and public lands are unavailable at the state and county levels; and

WHEREAS, we recognize that there may be certain circumstances in which the limited transfer of federal public lands under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act may be appropriate and beneficial to local communities; and

WHEREAS, the La Plata County Board of County Commissioners held a public hearing and solicited public comment on the topic on May 12, 2015;

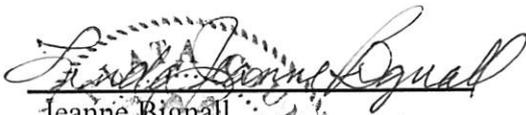
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Commissioners of La Plata County, Colorado, that:

1. The La Plata County Board of County Commissioners strongly supports continued federal land ownership and management in La Plata County, and the irreplaceable value these public lands bring to our county's economy, recreation, heritage, and quality of life.
2. The La Plata County Board of County Commissioners enthusiastically commends the dedicated federal employees who manage America's public lands in La Plata County, as well as the dedicated employees of the State of Colorado who manage fish, wildlife and forests in La Plata County, in partnership with the federal public land managers.

DONE AND APPROVED by the Board of Commissioners of La Plata County, Colorado, this 12th day of May, 2015.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
LA PLATA COUNTY, COLORADO

ATTEST:



Jeanne Bignall,
Clerk to the Board





Gwen Lachelt, Chair



Bradford Blake, Vice-Chair



Julie Westendorff, Commissioner