



June 24, 2025

The Honorable Chairman Lee
Members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Energy and Natural Resources Committee Office
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Sent via electronic mail

RE: City of Steamboat Springs Opposition to Sale of Public Lands

Dear Chairman Lee and Members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee,

The City of Steamboat Springs strongly opposes the Senate's proposal in its reconciliation bill to sell off Bureau of Land Management (BLM) public lands.

It is often said that public lands drive local economies and sustain western culture—let us offer you an example that is close to home. Emerald Mountain sits west of the Yampa River. At its base, the City operates the oldest ski area in North America and we help host pro rodeo in the summer. The City has acquired and preserved hundreds of acres of Emerald Mountain and built trails for horseback riding, hiking, and biking.

The backside of Emerald Mountain is BLM land— designated as a Special Recreation Management Area. In partnership with the federal government, our community has built access and trails to this wild side of Emerald Mountain, where elk find critical calving grounds. We were startled to see Emerald Mountain on the map of federal lands that could be sold to the highest bidder. Although it is not formally protected under the reconciliation proposal, Emerald Mountain is a public treasure in Northwest Colorado and threats to its preservation mean serious consequences for the City and our investments to date in its preservation.

The current language in the Senate proposal suggests these lands will be “used solely for the development of housing.” We note that this language does not limit sales to affordable housing, and in our region, sales to the highest bidder looking to develop high-end residential products would be a more likely outcome.

Our City in northwestern Colorado is surrounded by public lands, and we have a crisis in affordable housing. The sale of public lands is not the answer to our problem. In our experience working to develop affordable housing, raw land acquisition is not the only barrier to building affordable housing. Infrastructure costs to provide roads, water, and public services are a significant burden.

Instead of seeking the sale of our public lands, we have worked in partnership with the Forest Service to develop affordable housing for Forest Service employees and low income residents on a parcel of Forest Service administrative property that is less than 10 acre parcel that is entirely surrounded by urban development. This project, under the Flexible Housing Partnerships Act, is similar to efforts in Breckenridge, Colorado and Idaho, where small properties within city limits may be appropriate for *leasing* of federal properties to address *affordable housing*. The Senate proposal is contrary to this careful, considered approach.

For the last fifty years, the federal government has had a policy of retaining federal lands for multiple uses. The Senate proposal would upend this approach and the communities who have relied upon the retention of public lands as we plan for sustainable economies and recreation opportunities. Indeed, the dollars, volunteer hours, and community efforts to preserve places like Emerald Mountain would be sacrificed for questionable gain. Emerald Mountain and the public lands that surround us draw visitors who contribute to our local economy and sustain our western heritage and way of life.

We urge you to reject the Senate's proposal for the sale of public lands. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about our objections to this proposal.

Sincerely,


Gail Garey, President
Steamboat Springs City Council

CC:

The Honorable Senator John Hickenlooper
The Honorable Senator Michael Bennet
The Honorable Congressman Joe Neguse
The Honorable Senator Lisa Murkowski
The Honorable Senator Susan Collins
The Honorable Senator Martin Heinrich
The Honorable Senator Chris Murphy