



June 23, 2025

The Honorable Senator Mike Lee
United States Senate
361A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE Garfield County, Colorado Board of County Commissioners, firmly opposes efforts to sell public lands as contemplated in the "One Big Beautiful Bill," that would mandate the sale of between 2.2 million and 3.3 million acres of public land owned by the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service

Dear Senator Lee,

On behalf of Garfield County Colorado, we are writing to express strong opposition to your recent proposal advocating for the sale of federally managed public lands, including those in Colorado and in Garfield County, specifically. This proposal is not only misguided but deeply threatening to the environmental, economic, and cultural integrity of our county, state and the American West at large.

Founded in 1883, Garfield County is known for its rural to resort character with the main economic drivers including energy development, tourism, and agriculture. The County encompasses approximately 3,000 square miles in Northwest Colorado and shares our western border with the State of Utah. Importantly, approximately 62% of these lands are owned and managed by the federal government where the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages 615,973 acres, and the United States Forest Service (USFS) manages 515,865 acres.

Garfield County's public lands are a cornerstone of our identity. They are places where we hunt, fish, camp, recreate, graze cattle, and develop our abundant natural resources such as natural gas. In Colorado alone, these public lands support a booming outdoor recreation economy that generates over \$60 billion annually in consumer spending nationwide and sustains thousands of jobs across our rural and urban communities. They are also vital to preserving clean air and water which is critical in our arid west.

To place this in shocking context for Colorado, the Forest Service manages 16 million acres, and the Bureau manages 8.3 million acres. "Eligible lands" that could be sold under the proposed bill include 9.38 million acres of Forest Service land and 4.96 million acres of BLM land.

Selling off public lands to private interests would permanently remove them from public access and stewardship. It would open the door to unchecked development and environmental degradation—without public input or oversight. This is not what Garfield County residents want. Time and again, we have endeavored to protect our open spaces, wildlife, and natural heritage. As a direct impact to Garfield County's culture, economic base and western heritage, your provisions in this bill to sell off public lands include lands available for livestock grazing jeopardizing ranching operations in Garfield County and across the West.

Moreover, your proposal ignores the constitutional and historical framework that makes these lands public in the first place. Federal lands are held in trust for the benefit of all Americans—not to be auctioned off for short-term profit or ideological gain.

A recent Headwaters Economics report found less than 2% of public lands in the West near housing-hungry towns are actually suitable for development, and could be complicated due to high wildfire risk.

A critical concern we have is that for the first decade, the land could only be sold for housing or related infrastructure — but after 10 years, that restriction vanishes, opening the door to virtually any kind of development.

Interestingly enough, the Senate proposal makes eligible federal lands in every western state but Montana. How is Montana able to enjoy this carveout and not other states? This provision alone bares out this ill-thought-out measure. It deliberately places a higher value of public lands in one state over another so that we are picking winners and losers across the federal western landscape. How was this determined?

It is important to point out that there are other frameworks that already exist as a method to achieve your desired outcomes, including FLPMA and the ***Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA)***, signed into law 25 years ago. FLTFA is a law that allows the Department of the Interior agencies and the USFS to use the proceeds from sales of BLM lands to acquire inholdings in national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests and BLM and designated areas, including the National Landscape Conservation System. The program helps consolidate the public-private land checkerboard in the West and advance local and state community, conservation, and recreation needs. FLTFA provides authority for the use of receipts from disposal actions under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) to fund qualifying acquisitions and administrative and other expenses necessary to carry out the land disposal program.

We find that FLTFA is a practical and effective legislative tool that advances federal, state, and community interests. More specifically, FLTFA supports local economies where land sales are limited to parcels identified as suitable for disposal in land use plans, often small or isolated

tracts. These sales return land to private ownership and local tax rolls, benefiting local governments and potentially spurring economic development.

It also enhances land management efficiency where it helps federal agencies consolidate land holdings, reducing administrative costs and increasing management efficiency. It also reduces issues associated with checkerboard land patterns (intermixed public and private lands), which can complicate fire management, law enforcement, and public access.

To be clear, the Garfield County Board of County Commissioners has remained a highly engaged advocate for public lands issues for decades specifically defending the multiple use mandate on our public lands through FLPMA and the NMFA. This proposal is reckless and flies in the face of good governance especially where there are existing tools in place to manage public land disposal.

We urge you to reconsider this proposal and instead work to strengthen the management and protection of our public lands. Failure to do so, this proposal is nothing more than a betrayal of the American people. These lands belong to all of us. They are not for sale.

Sincerely,



Commissioner Mike Samson



Commissioner Perry Will

- Cc U.S. Senator John Hickenlooper
- U. S. Senator Michael Benett
- U. S. Representative Jeff Hurd
- U.S. Representative Joe Neguse
- U.S. Representative Lauren Boebert