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Dolores River Canyon Country Protection Campaign

Application Date	5/31/2024		
Applying Organization	Colorado Wildlands Project (a project of Wilderness Workshop)	Grant Type	Member Directed
Requested Amount	\$50,000.00	Project Name	Dolores River Canyon Country Protection Campaign
Contact Name	Scott Braden	Project Location (State or Territory)	CO
Contact Title	Director	Project State/Province	CO
Contact Email Address	scott@cowildlands.org	Project Multiple Locations	
Notes		Status	Submitted
		Created By	Scott Braden, 5/31/2024, 5:46 PM

Organization Details

Organization Name	Colorado Wildlands Project	Annual Operating Budget	\$445,000.00
Applying Contact	Scott Braden	Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	4	Main Phone	720-530-7473
Total Membership	1,000	Website Address	https://www.cowildlands.org
BIPOC-led	No	Address	P.O. Box 3842 Grand Junction, Colorado 81502 United States
C-Suite Staff			

Proposal Questions

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| <p>1. Purpose/History Of Organization</p> <p>The Colorado Wildlands Project works to protect wild public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). We are dedicated to the conservation, climate resilience, and equitable management of our public lands. We rally support around wildland protection in western Colorado, collaborating with partners across the Colorado Plateau.</p> <p>The Colorado Wildlands Project was</p> | <p>2. Final Success</p> <p>Final success for the Dolores River Canyon Country Protection Campaign is permanent protection of up to 500,000 acres of public lands surrounding 162 river miles of the Lower Dolores River in Colorado below McPhee Dam, accomplished through a combination of increased administrative protections, National Conservation Area legislation, and designation of Dolores Canyons National Monument.</p> |
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formed in 2020 to address a gap in advocacy for BLM wildlands in western Colorado. We are an independent, fiscal-sponsored project housed at Wilderness Workshop, responsible for raising all revenues to meet our Project budget.

3. Location Details

Public lands surrounding the Lower Dolores River comprise one of the largest unprotected wildlands complexes in Colorado. Though the river is impounded upstream by McPhee Dam, wild places and outstanding values surround the river along its remote course through the rugged interior of the Western Slope. These lands contain nationally-significant historical, cultural, and scientific values facing significant threats that make the area a prime candidate for protection as a national monument.

Redrock canyons and mesas, salt valleys, dinosaur tracks, and hoodoos contribute to a stunningly revealed geology. Dolores Canyon Country is stocked with critical big game habitats, trophy hunting units, endangered and endemic Colorado River fish, riparian corridors, and isolated relict plants on ungrazed mesas. We commissioned a recent analysis highlighting the public lands encompassing western Colorado's Dolores River as the state's largest, most biodiverse unprotected landscape. Conservation of this rich biodiversity will help increase the resilience of the watershed in the face of climate change.

These lands are the homelands of the Ute people, forcibly removed in the 1880s, and still living on three nearby reservations. Sacred sites, petroglyph panels, and other cultural sites span the region. The last 150 years of colonization and settlement left many historical sites in the area, documenting successive mining booms for gold, vanadium and uranium.

The Dolores, like much of Colorado, is facing rapidly growing recreational demand and capacity issues. The Dolores River is popular with boaters when there are boatable flows. The surrounding public lands support a growing network of world-class trails, climbing, hiking, and mountain biking opportunities. Protection of the landscape's integrity will ensure these high quality recreational values persist, and that new recreational infrastructure will be thoughtfully planned in the context of protecting the area's other values.

The public lands of the Dolores face growing threats from mining in wildlands, unmanaged recreation, and impacts of climate change. A renewed interest and speculation in uranium mining has

4. Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

Our strategy is to protect the Dolores River Canyon Country by layering interwoven executive, legislative, and administrative protections that each move the needle towards landscape-level conservation. The Conservation Alliance's partnership and elevation of the Dolores as a priority is essential to accomplishing our shared goals for this landscape. Your solidarity in advocacy, as well as funding, broadens our coalition and expands our influence, increasing our likelihood of success.

Our most prominent goal is to designate a nearly 400,000 acre national monument using the authority of the Antiquities Act during President Biden's first term. Under the leadership of Senator Bennet and close coordination with Senator Hickenlooper, we are supporting an effort to release draft legislation, engage sovereign Tribal support, negotiate boundaries, and satisfy concerns of key stakeholders. Our goal and expectation is that the national monument proclamation will happen before the election or be first in line for designation in a second Biden term.

Another critical component is legislative action, namely ensuring enactment of the Dolores River National Conservation Area and Special Management Area Act, which would protect 70,000 acres in the southern portion of the landscape. It is complementary to the national monument proposal, helping achieve comprehensive permanent protection.

The third goal is to increase administrative protections in two key planning processes that are underway and set to be completed in the next year. Administrative designations and special management provides interim protections and closure to harmful development, including mining claims and future oil and gas leasing.

The BLM Grand Junction Field Office overlaps with about 200,000 acres of the monument proposal, and is close to releasing the final supplemental plan that updates existing management. For the Dolores, we anticipate this plan will close the entire area to future oil and gas leasing and add protections to about 80,000 acres of inventoried wilderness-quality lands. We expect this plan to be complete in October 2024.

unleashed a flurry of new mining claims, proposals, and other industrial developments from foreign interests. New mining, poor or reactive responses to recreational demand, and climate change all threaten this cultural landscape, as well as the scenery, wildlife and intactness of the landscape.

The BLM Uncompahgre Field Office overlaps with over 85,000 acres of the monument proposal, and is developing a draft amendment to the existing management plan. We expect the draft plan to be released in December of 2024. CWP nominated expanded boundaries for several Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) that BLM is carrying forward in the draft alternatives, including a Dolores River Riparian and Paradox Cliffs ACEC, and advocated for the likely expansion of the Dolores River Canyon Wilderness Study Area to include adjacent wilderness-quality lands. Both actions would substantially improve administrative protections to core areas of the monument proposal.

CWP plays a key leadership role in both the monument and administrative protections strategies, while also supporting the passage of the NCA legislation. We believe that holistic advocacy for the Dolores is the most expeditious way to increase protections on the ground. The different strategies reinforce each other by helping stakeholders, land managers, and policymakers perceive the Dolores as a prime candidate for landscape-level conservation. The monument campaign and legislative efforts increase the profile of the landscape throughout the administrative process and creates additional pressure for land managers to prioritize protections. In turn, the increased administrative protections help local elected leaders like county commissioners see that the trend is towards more conservation on these lands in the future, and aids in the negotiation of permanent protections in the monument or legislative context.

Conservation of Dolores River Canyon Country supports sustainable recreational opportunities in the area. These opportunities can support the diverse economy of our region and the transitioning economies of local communities. Grand Junction is fifteen miles from the proposed national monument, and has successfully transitioned from being an extractive industry-dependent town into a model community that embraces outdoor recreation and leverages nearby protected public lands to grow its economy across diverse sectors. After a century of booms and busts and recent closure of a nearby coal mine and power plant, other nearby communities such as Naturita could benefit from moderately-paced increases in visitation and recreation as they remake their economies. There are many notable examples of success from communities that have successfully shifted to rely

more on the values on the surface of public lands rather than what can be extracted from below ground. Additionally, Colorado Highway 141 runs through the middle of much of the proposed national monument, providing broad accessibility, including lower impact visitation and interpretive opportunities.

5. Key Decision Makers

Operationally, our key focus on decision makers is on Colorado's U.S. Senators. Both Sen. Bennet and Sen. Hickenlooper are actively engaged in stakeholder outreach. Sen. Bennet has privately committed to leading a process to permanently protect the Dolores River Canyon Country, including development of draft legislation in the coming months. In 2024, both senators are taking trips to the Dolores, leading stakeholder meetings, convening public meetings and leading outreach efforts to the Ute Tribes. The request of Colorado's senators is an essential precondition for President Biden to designate a national monument. With the supportive posture of both Colorado senators, we are on track. CWP and Dolores River Boating Advocates are in daily contact with the staffs of both senate offices to drive the work forward in a tight time frame.

Ultimately, the most important decision maker for the permanent protection of the Dolores landscape is President Biden, for he has the sole authority to proclaim a national monument. His executive office, including the Council on Environmental Quality, will play an important role in moving Dolores Canyons National Monument from proposal to proclamation. Additionally, the BLM is updating two relevant management plans to increase conservation protections, which aligns with the agency's new Public Lands Rule and the Biden Administration's focus on preserving intact landscapes and restoring degraded ones.

7. Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

- Public introduction of draft monument legislation by Senator Michael Bennet
- Secretarial visit to the Dolores proposed monument
- Securing administrative protections for the landscape that: close the majority of the area to new oil and gas leasing; protect at least 80,000 new acres of inventoried wilderness-quality lands, and designation of new Areas of Critical Environmental Concern for BLM lands in the Dolores.
- Official support for a monument from one or more of the Ute Tribes.

6. Elevate Voices

Our geographic focus is on public lands of Western Colorado. These public lands are the unceded homelands of the Ute People and have been important to other Tribes and indigenous people since time immemorial. Most of these same public lands were reserved for the Ute Tribe until the federal government revoked this reservation in 1881 and forcibly removed members of the Ute Tribe to two smaller reservations in southern Colorado and another in northern Utah.

Tribal engagement in the Dolores effort is crucial to protecting these public lands and the tribes have a critical role in shaping the future management of these lands. We have hosted or participated in several trips with families and elders from the Ute Tribes to the Dolores. Under the leadership of Senator Bennet, we are in dialogue with these sovereign Tribes about Tribal support and leadership for the Dolores monument proposal. Like Bears Ears in Utah, there is a co-stewardship opportunity for Dolores that would represent, in small measure, an act of restorative justice. Our coalition as well as our senate champs believe that Tribal involvement, support and leadership are essential to our shared goal of Dolores River Canyon Country.

Our advocacy includes grassroots outreach to Tribal communities as well. CWP is helping to lead a Tribal family trip to the Dolores again in June 2024. Additionally, CWP supports grassroots organizing with a focus on Mesa County. We work to engage a diverse community of local residents to join us in advocating for conservation of public lands.

8. Evaluate Your Progress

Thanks to all of our collective hard work and organizing over the past year as the Protect the Dolores Coalition, we are starting from a position of strength as one of the leading national monument candidates in the country. Thanks to the prioritization, support and leadership of the Conservation Alliance, we have the engagement of both Colorado senators on the issue and a robust and diverse coalition to push permanent protections to the finish line.

The next year will be determinative of our success by the proclamation of a new national monument in 2024, or a

clear pathway to proclamation in the subsequent months. Complementary administrative designations in both the Grand Junction and Uncompahgre Resource Management Plan amendments will also be an important metric of success. Finally, enactment of the NCA legislation late in the 117th Congress will be a further evaluative element of success.

9. TCA Funding Plan

We propose using Conservation Alliance funding to support our full organizational commitment to this campaign, including staff time spent in this coalition effort, creation of advocacy materials, field trips to the landscape to educate key stakeholders and staff travel to meet with key decision makers in Colorado and Washington, D.C.

We will continue to build public awareness and support for protecting the Dolores. We will continue to build support from Colorado counties, elected officials, business owners, organizations reflecting the broad diversity of our conservation and recreation community. We will develop more spokespeople and continue to shape a public narrative that focuses on the irreplaceable values and positive benefits a national monument will provide to surrounding communities such as Grand Junction and beyond.

11. Confidential Items

Our proposal should not be publicly available online (sharing with member companies is fine, of course) beyond a short description like in proposal questions 1 and 2. Please coordinate with CWP on any additional public posting of materials. Thanks for asking!

10. JEDI Efforts and Impact

We are committed to embedding diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) into everything that we do, including our campaigns, proposal development, hiring, and coalition engagement. We acknowledge that building relationships with the Ute Tribes and individual Native Americans is a prerequisite for all of our efforts. Over the past year, we participated in field visits and several conversations to ensure the Dolores campaign is rooted in Tribal knowledge and support.

We recently expanded our small staff to be four individuals representing several diverse identities. We celebrate our flat structure and encourage our staff to show up as their authentic selves. This benefits our work, as we consistently consider multiple perspectives and innovative strategies to achieve our goals.

Other Relevant Application Details

Please let us know if you wish to see our fiscal sponsorship agreement with Wilderness Workshop.