

• Backcountry Hunters & Anglers • Colorado Mountain Club • Colorado Sierra Club
Colorado State Chapter – National Wild Turkey Federation • Colorado Wild Public Lands
Colorado Wildlands Project • Conservation Colorado • Continental Divide Trail Coalition
Dolores River Boating Advocates • EcoFlight • Environment America • Environment Colorado
High Country Conservation Advocates • Mountain Mamas • Quiet Use Coalition
Rocky Mountain Wild • San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council • The Wilderness Society
Western Resource Advocates • Western Slope Conservation Center • Wild Connections
•Wilderness Workshop • Wildlands Network •

November 11, 2025

Colorado State Land Board
1127 Sherman Street, Suite 300
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Commissioners:

On behalf of a broad coalition of Colorado conservation and recreation organizations, hunting and angling groups, and San Luis Valley partners, we urge the Board to give final approval to the proposed transfer of the La Jara State Trust Land in Conejos County to the national public land management agencies and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), as your staff has spent years preparing.

This project is exactly what Coloradans say they want from their public institutions: a negotiated, bipartisan, multi-agency conservation outcome that protects working lands and wildlife, expands public access beyond what the current hunting and fishing lease allows, and delivers a very substantial return to the State Land Board and the school trust. It has taken years of work by the State Land Board, Conejos County, CPW, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and many local stakeholders to line up this opportunity. At this stage, walking away would not simply be “deferring” action — it would likely mean losing the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) dollars that have been specifically set aside over multiple fiscal years for this property, and losing credibility with the very partners who helped get us here. LWCF dollars are extremely competitive; a decision to walk away from the deal at the eleventh hour could also have dire consequences for future LWCF acquisitions in Colorado.

The State Land Board’s own October 2025 materials make this plain: federal acquisition at the appraised value is available now, it is supported by Colorado’s Senators, Governor Polis, Conejos County, State Senator Cleave Simpson, agricultural lessees who rely on the property for summer pasture, and a long list of sportsmen and conservation groups. Board staff also note that,

if the Board denies the transaction now, it is “unlikely the federal government will seek to acquire this property again in the near future” and the appropriated funds “are not likely to be otherwise used to support conservation and expanded recreation in Colorado.” Failure to achieve this once-in-a-generation opportunity is not an option. Failure to approve the sale would leave our U.S. Senators wondering why they spent three years fighting in Washington, D.C. to secure this federal funding for the largest LWCF project in our state’s history, only to see that money move to projects in other states.

We understand that some concerns have been raised about “federal stewardship uncertainty” and future federal budgets. But, as your own staff analysis also describes, this acquisition would be made with LWCF dollars, which are among the most durable conservation investments available. Under BLM guidance, LWCF-acquired lands are intended to stay in public ownership, and disposing of them would require extraordinary, highly public action. In practice, rejecting the La Jara transaction now on the theory that federal agencies cannot be trusted to manage public land aligns more with the position advanced by Utah Senator Mike Lee and, at times, President Trump — that federal public lands should be reduced, privatized or owned by state governments. That is not an acceptable signal for the State of Colorado to send after Congress just appropriated three years of funding and formally backed this project and rejected Senator Lee’s push to sell off public lands in H.R. 1, the budget reconciliation bill that passed this year.

Just as important, your staff has already laid out the consequences of a “hold and improve” approach: it would not generate redeployable proceeds; it would almost certainly disappoint the local community that has been told for eight years this transfer was coming; and it could strain relationships with the USFS, BLM, CPW, and the many hunting, fishing, agricultural and other local partners who engaged in good faith. For a Board that has done careful, transparent work on La Jara since 2017, reversing course this late would look less like prudent asset management and more like backing away from a major, well-supported community and conservation win right at the finish line.

La Jara is the kind of property that shows Colorado at its best: habitat connectivity from the Rio Grande National Forest to BLM lands, expanded year-round public access and local use, protection of culturally important places, and real economic benefit in an under-resourced part of the state. The proposed transfer keeps all of that public with the national public land management agencies and CPW, secures broader recreation opportunities than the current program allows, and still lets the State Land Board reinvest up to \$49.5 million into higher-yielding assets.

LWCF is one of the most successful conservation programs of the past half-century. Since its inception in 1965, billions of dollars in LWCF funding have helped build parks, conserve lands or create opportunities for getting outdoors in nearly every county in the United States. Colorado has received approximately \$357 million in LWCF funding over the past five decades, protecting

places like the Great Sand Dunes National Park, Uncompahgre, Arapahoe-Roosevelt, Gunnison and Rio Grande National Forests, and Canyon of the Ancients National Monument. Most of our groups were strong proponents of the permanent reauthorization of LWCF, secured through the bipartisan John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act in 2019 and the Great American Outdoors Act in 2020. Both of these bills passed with strong bipartisan support and both were signed into law by President Trump.

For all of these reasons — the original goals that the State Land Board committed to years ago, the extraordinary coalition support in the San Luis Valley and across the state, the secured federal funds, and the reputational cost of backing away now — we respectfully urge you to approve the La Jara transfer to the USFS, BLM and CPW.

Thank you for your service to Colorado’s trust beneficiaries and to the communities who depend on these lands.

Sincerely,

<u>Name and Title</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Devin O’Dea — Western Policy & Conservation Manager	Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Brian Bergeler — Conservation and Stewardship Director	Colorado Mountain Club
Alexis Schwartz — Senior Field Organizer	Colorado Sierra Club
Patt Dorsey — Director of Conservation Operations	Colorado State Chapter – National Wild Turkey Federation
Nicholas Green — Executive Director	Colorado Wild Public Lands
Soren Jespersen — Director	Colorado Wildlands Project
Luke Schafer — West Slope Director	Conservation Colorado
Jordan Williams — Colorado Regional Representative	Continental Divide Trail Coalition
Rica Fulton — Advocacy and Stewardship Director	Dolores River Boating Advocates

Jane Pargiter — Executive Director	EcoFlight
Ellen Montgomery — Great Outdoors Campaign Director	Environment America
Henry Stiles — Advocate	Environment Colorado
Ean Tafoya — VP of State Programs	GreenLatinos
Jon Hare — Advocacy Director	High Country Conservation Advocates
Sara Kuntzler — Colorado State Director	Mountain Mamas
Tom Sobal — Director	Quiet Use Coalition
Alison Gallensky — Conservation Geographer / Leadership Team	Rocky Mountain Wild
Christine Canaly — Director	San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council
Jim Ramey — Colorado State Director	The Wilderness Society
Tarn Udall — Senior Attorney	Western Resource Advocates
Melissa Newell — Advocacy Coordinator	Western Slope Conservation Center
John Sztukowski — Co-Executive Director / Conservation	Wild Connections
Will Roush — Executive Director	Wilderness Workshop
Michal Dax — Western Program Director	Wildlands Network

CC:

Colorado Governor Jared Polis
 U.S. Senator Michael Bennet
 U.S. Senator John Hickenlooper
 U.S. Representative Diana DeGette
 U.S. Representative Joe Neguse
 U.S. Representative Jeff Hurd
 U.S. Representative Lauren Boebert
 U.S. Representative Jeff Crank
 U.S. Representative Jason Crow

U.S. Representative Brittany Pettersen

U.S. Representative Gabe Evans

Dan Gibbs, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Natural Resources

Nicole Rosemarino, Executive Director, Colorado State Land Board