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July 28, 2006

Mark Rey, Under Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue
Washington D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Rey:

Many residents of western Colorado are puzzled by the recent actions of the U.S. Forest Service. The draft Forest Plan for the Grand Mesa-Uncompahgre-Gunnison National Forests (known here in Colorado as GMUG) was scheduled to be released this week. Because this plan will lay out broad directions for the management of these three National Forests for the next 15 years, there has been significant public involvement in the development of the plan over four years and great anticipation of the plan's release.

My office was briefed on the draft plan earlier this week, and copies of the plan had already been printed and were ready for immediate distribution. However, yesterday, my office was advised that the plan would not be released. Because of this surprise change in the release date, there are many rumors about the reason for delay, the most troubling being suggestions that political pressure was exerted on USDA headquarters to go against the results of a public process.

I am concerned by the sudden change in direction by the Forest Service and the delay in release of the draft GMUG Forest Plan and would like to hear directly from you the reasons for the delay. The GMUG process to develop the draft plan has been a model for public information and involvement. The public, including affected mineral operators, has been invited to participate in dozens of meetings over the course of several years to help guide the preparation of this draft plan, and there will be widespread skepticism if the plan is now pulled back for revision.

Please advise me at your earliest opportunity on the status of the draft GMUG Forest Plan.

Sincerely,



Ken Salazar
United States Senator