

Jonathan Houck

Gunnison County Commissioner (since 2012)
First elected Gunnison City Council/Mayor 2007



WHY DID YOU RUN FOR OFFICE?

Although I have been part of many notable accomplishments in my time as an elected official (building public facilities, creating new and innovative programs, successfully navigating the pandemic and developing successful legislation), I am more inclined to promote a culture that is inclusive and responsive to all the citizens I represent. The greatest accomplishment is to be part of something bigger than myself, and I feel I have helped develop a countywide approach to tackling challenges that is built on collaboration, teamwork, listening, informed action and longterm vision that is rooted in the legacy and values of what I have learned in my 30-plus years in Gunnison County.

If I was to highlight one effort that encapsulates all of the above, it would be the Gunnison

PUBLIC LANDS INITIATIVE. CURRENTLY IN DRAFT FORMAT AS THE GORP ACT (GUNNISON OUTDOOR RESOURCE

Protection Act), it is the culmination of over 10 years' work on the ground in coordination with Colorado Senator Bennet to seek additional public lands protection for over 400,000 acres of federal public lands within Gunnison County. I would like to take the collective voice of the citizens of Gunnison County and get this piece of federal legislation introduced and passed before I conclude my time as county commissioner.

WHAT WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO ACCOMPLISH AS AN ELECTED LEADER?

Like most mountain and rural resort communities, we see affordable workforce housing as one of our top challenges. Additionally, the impacts of climate change can be seen directly in Gunnison County. We are the headwaters of the Gunnison River, which is the second-largest tributary to the Colorado River system. Climate change has impacted every aspect of our economy and way of life in Gunnison County, including range conditions for our ranchers, inconsistent snow for our ski resort and our winter tourist economy, as well as impacts to wildlife, forest health, invasive species spread (cheatgrass) and decline in habitat for big game, aquatic species and recreation opportunities, all of which creates more pressure on water resources. The ever-looming fire danger combined with more folks than ever enjoying our public lands means that new approaches to land management and stewardship are more important than ever.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING YOUR COMMUNITY?

I believe that protecting the health and safety of our community comes first. The biggest threat to our quality of life is the severe ozone non-attainment status of Denver Metro and the Front Range.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE CONSIDERING RUNNING FOR OFFICE FOR THE FIRST TIME?

Be sure you approach the work from the perspective of a learner. The vast number of topics and issues that local government deals with means elected leaders need to have the inclination to constantly be willing to read, study, learn and grow.

IS THERE A CONSERVATION-RELATED POLICY, RULE OR IDEA YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IMPLEMENTED AT THE LOCAL, STATE OR NATIONAL LEVEL?

I would like to see the outdoor recreation/sporting interests have a more equal seat at the table with timber, ag and extraction industries when it comes to public lands planning and decisionmaking. Acknowledging that outdoor recreation has legitimate impacts as well, it also has the opportunity to support a more balanced local economy and community interest much like agricultural operations often do.

YOU'VE PARTICIPATED IN SO MANY IMPORTANT CLIMATE AND CONSERVATION-RELATED CAMPAIGNS, FROM STRONGER STATE OIL AND GAS POLLUTION RULES, TO THE RECENT DESIGNATION OF CAMP HALE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE NATIONAL MONUMENT. WHAT INSPIRES YOU TO GET INVOLVED IN ISSUES BEYOND THE SCOPE OF YOUR IMMEDIATE COMMUNITY?

Although I represent a geographically defined area (Gunnison County), I believe that strong leadership finds opportunities to collaborate with others for policies and solutions that are beneficial to the greater good. Policies and programs that support clean air and water should be everyone's concerns. Camp Hale was part of the CORE Act proposal, which seeks additional public lands protections across western Colorado. Over half of the CORE Act proposal is in Gunnison County (a significant portion of the Thompson Divide and the majority of the Curecanti National Recreation Area), and I have been an advocate for the whole CORE Act, not just those areas located in Gunnison County.



AS A LOCAL OFFICIAL, IS THERE AN EARTH DAY MESSAGE YOU'D LIKE TO IMPART TO OTHER LEADERS?

Get out there!!! We spend a lot of time in meetings, on Zoom calls, attending conferences and way too much screen time responding to emails, researching and collaborating with others -- and this is all important work, but we need to remember to get out there, too. Get outside and go for a hike, go fish, mountain bike, ski, bird watch, sit in the park, walk across town, backpack in a wilderness area, camp or do whatever it takes to get you outside and into the natural world. I have found that the connection to wild spaces makes me a better leader and a more grounded person. Earth Day is every day!

