

November 28, 2012

White River National Forest Oil and Gas dEIS
PO Box 1919
Sacramento, CA 95812
Via email: WRNFOilandgascomments@fscomments.org

Re: WRNF Oil and Gas Leasing Draft EIS

Dear Mr. Fitzwilliams and Land Managers,

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (dEIS) for Oil and Gas Leasing on the White River National Forest (WRNF). I am a rancher whose livelihood depends on irrigation water that originates from snowmelt, surface runoff and springs on the WRNF dating back to 1885. I urge the Forest Service to implement plan B, authorizing no future leasing on the WRNF and asking the agency to ensure development of existing leases will not degrade the Thompson Divide area and Roadless areas.

I would like to emphasize the following:

WATER

Clean water is the foundation of life and livelihood in the West and frankly the world. The watersheds of the Thompson Divide area encompass 15 different headwaters where the runoff water is currently as pure as the snow. This alone should be a valid reason to protect the Thompson Divide area from drilling and the associated impacts of roadbuilding, traffic, dust on snowpack, pads, spills, and fracking. The Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act do not protect waters impacted by drilling. It is therefore imperative that the Forest Service provides the highest protection of our water resources, such as it does for high elevation WRNF watersheds.

AGRICULTURE

Farming and ranching with the associated irrigation and grazing are key occupational and economic drivers in the West. WRNF is integral to these operations in providing clean water and healthy forage and habitat for grazing. The industrial development of oil and gas drilling creates many problems for agriculture such as roadbuilding, traffic, and fragmenting of the landscape. Healthy habitat means unfragmented areas with little or no disturbance for both livestock and wildlife. A gas pipeline that was put in 1991 traverses our ranch. We are still trying to mitigate the effects of weed introduction and erosion. The long-term control of weeds is not adequately addressed in the dEIS. Concerns about the need for uncontaminated water for agriculture, domestic use, municipal use, wildlife, and habit cannot be stressed enough and would be threatened by drilling development.

SUSTAINABLE LOCAL ECONOMY

WRNF is our backyard and we depend on it for its primary uses of agriculture, hunting, and recreation as well as many secondary economies supporting local businesses such as gas stations, restaurants, motels, retail shops, grocery stores, health clinics, as well as the support of fire fighters and law enforcement. Our Western culture has suffered from the boom and bust of past gas development, but has sustained itself over time through establishing solid local economies that all are tied in so many ways to a healthy and sustainable WRNF as it currently is.

WILDLIFE AND HABITAT

The mid-elevation habitat of the Thompson Divide area provides a chock stone of land connecting the Grand Mesa, Flattops, and Maroon Bells for wildlife migration, calving and fawning grounds, as well as healthy forage and water. Key big game species and predators speak to the productivity and diversity of wildlife, birds, small game, insects and on down to the soil and water micro invertebrates. The Thompson Divide area of WRNF is a model example of good game management and healthy habitat. Industrial development associated with oil and gas drilling is not compatible with this.

THOMPSON DIVIDE COALITION

The Thompson Divide Coalition (TDC) has been working as a grassroots organization for 4 years to protect the federal lands, primarily WRNF, of the Thompson Divide area. In the dEIS WRNF has chosen to ignore TDC and its mission. TDC represents a broad spectrum of the public who use and depend on the public lands of WRNF in many ways. TDC has studied and analyzed several springs for Baseline Water Quality in the Thompson Divide area. TDC has brought attention to the leases in WRNF that were let contrary to the 2001 Roadless Rule, which should be applied. Local communities have actively demonstrated their support of a healthy WRNF and do not want to see oil and gas development in this area. I support TDC and the comments to WRNF dEIS by Thompson Divide Coalition.

Again, I would like the WRNF EIS to support no new drilling in the Thompson Divide area, which is covered in Alternative B.

The quality and sustainability of our communities depends on clean air and water, the success of agriculture, hunting, recreation, wildlife habitat and wildlife preservation. The public asks that our public lands be protected from the industrial development of future oil and gas leasing. Many places in the West have and will be developed for our insatiable appetite for oil and gas. By not developing The Thompson Divide area, the resources will not be wasted or go away, any resources that occur have been there for millions of years! It is essential to save WRNF as a model for the nation, our children and future generations. The Thompson Divide area of WRNF is unique and valued as it is and would be greatly harmed by oil and gas drilling.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Judy Fox-Perry
Watergap Ranch
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