

July 17, 2026

Jessica Vogt
c/o Hahns Peak-Bears Ears Ranger District
925 Weiss Dr.
Steamboat Springs, CO 80487
Sent via email: jessica.vogt@usda.gov

RE: Comments on USFS Consent to Lease BLM Project 329269, 10-Parcel Lease, Hahns Peak-Bears Ears Ranger District

Dear Ms. Vogt,

We are writing as individual members of the Steamboat Springs City Council, in our personal capacities and not on behalf of the City of Steamboat Springs or the Council as a body, to submit these comments in opposition to the U.S. Forest Service granting consent to the Bureau of Land Management to lease ten parcels, totaling approximately 13,850 acres, located roughly 30 miles northwest of Steamboat Springs within the Hahns Peak-Bears Ears Ranger District of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest. Although the parcels sit outside city limits, we have serious concerns about the long-term impacts of this decision on our region's water, wildlife, recreation economy, and public lands.

These parcels are public lands. The consent to lease decision now before the Forest Service is the decision that determines whether they become available for future oil and gas development. Any actual drilling would still require additional site-specific review at the Application for Permit to Drill stage, but that later review does not change the fact that consent to lease is the step that makes future development possible. We ask the Forest Service to weigh the long-term ecological and economic value of these lands, not just the industry's interest in leasing them, before taking that first step.

Oil and gas development in this part of Routt County has a long history of failing to translate into meaningful production or revenue. Prior leasing activity in the area has not proven commercially viable, and we are concerned that any development that does move forward would depend on subsidies rather than genuine market demand. We do not support public subsidy of fossil fuel extraction on public lands. By contrast, the outdoor recreation economy tied to these lands, including hiking, biking, hunting, and fishing, is a proven and durable source of income for our community and county. A recent statewide poll found that 83 percent of Colorado voters oppose selling national public lands for oil, gas, and mining development¹, reflecting where public sentiment in our state now stands.

Although the parcels sit outside city limits, Steamboat Springs still has a stake in what happens to this land through water. Six of the ten parcels contain sensitive watersheds within the Slater Creek and Little Snake River drainages, a major tributary that joins the Yampa River roughly 45 miles west of Craig, well downstream of Steamboat Springs. While this drainage sits below rather than above our community, it remains part of the same Yampa River Basin that Steamboat Springs depends on and has long worked to protect. Degradation of water quality, increased sedimentation, or disruption to these watersheds would affect fisheries, wildlife, and water resources shared across the basin. As snowpack declines and drought becomes more frequent in our region, protecting the ecological function of these lands is part of protecting the long-term health of the river system we all rely on.

¹Colorado College, 2026 Conservation in the West Poll (State of the Rockies Project, Feb. 2026), as reported in Axios Denver, "Conservation in the West poll finds environmental concerns are mounting among Westerners in 8 states," Feb. 18, 2026.

The parcels also overlap extensively with High Priority Habitat identified by Colorado Parks and Wildlife, including elk production areas for the E-2 Bears Ears elk herd, mule deer migration corridors, Greater Sage-Grouse habitat, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse habitat, and cutthroat trout waters. The E-2 elk herd suffered a severe decline after the winter of 2022-2023 and has only recently begun to recover, aided by the quality and connectivity of habitat in areas like these parcels. Disturbing that habitat now, while the herd is still rebuilding, works directly against the recovery the state has been working to achieve. These parcels represent some of the last unfragmented, undisturbed habitat of this scale remaining in Colorado, and that scarcity alone argues for caution.

Several of the parcels overlap Colorado Roadless Areas, including the Black Mountain and Sugarloaf North Roadless Rule Areas, as well as the California Park Special Interest Area. Under the Colorado Roadless Rule, adopted in 2012, road construction and reconstruction are prohibited within these areas for any oil and gas lease issued after July 3, 2012. Any lease issued today would fall well outside the narrow exceptions written into that rule. We have consistently supported strong protections for roadless areas because of the intact habitat, watershed function, and recreation access they preserve, and we do not believe the Forest Service can reconcile new leasing in these areas with the plain language of the rule.

Finally, we note that the environmental analysis supporting this consent relies heavily on a 1993 Oil and Gas Environmental Impact Statement, prepared more than three decades ago and well before horizontal drilling became widespread in Colorado's oil and gas fields. Given the age of that analysis and the significance of the resources at stake, we believe a more current, project-specific review is warranted before any consent to lease is granted.

For all of these reasons, we respectfully urge the Forest Service to deny consent to lease for BLM Project 329269. We ask that the agency give full weight to the cumulative water, wildlife, recreation, and economic impacts described above before making this decision.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gail Garey
Council President Pro Tem, City of Steamboat Springs
Submitted in an individual capacity

Amy Dickson
City Councilor, City of Steamboat Springs
Submitted in an individual capacity