Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/21/2012 1:02:45 AM
First name: Cecily
Last name: Anne
Organization:
Title:
Comments: Comments on WRNF DEIS leasing plan

To the U.S. Forest Service

As the White River National Forest considers long-term plans for oil and gas leasing, you must protect our roadless areas and the Thompson Divide from oil and gas drilling. Oil and gas extraction including drilling, fracking, processing, and pipelines, threatens clean air, clean water, pristine and unfragmented natural areas, and valuable wildlife habitat in our forests and the health of nearby communities.

There are still many scientific unknowns about the extent of these risks or the methods to safeguard the environment and human health. I am concerned about the values at stake in the White River National Forest, including the drinking water provided to many nearby communities and downstream users, and irrigation water sustaining local agriculture, the wildlife habitat for endangered and other important species, and the local economies that rely upon tourism and recreation.

I urge the Forest Service to place all roadless areas off limits for new leasing because of the road construction and fragmentation such leasing will ultimately cause. This was found essential by the national Roadless Rule to preserve the integrity of wild forests and protect habitat and drinking water from industrial development. Preserving these lands is even more important in the face of ceaseless development pressures and the changing climate.

The Thompson Divide, in its entirety, should be unavailable for oil and gas leasing because of the area's importance to local people and communities in its current, undeveloped, and unfragmented state. The area provides clean water, grazing lands, wildlife habitat, and countless recreational opportunities to people near and far. Such opportunities would be severely impacted by future drilling in the area.

In addition, the Forest Service must require the highest level of air pollution controls to protect the clean air for the forest, nearby communities, and natural wonders in the area like the world-famous Maroon Bells. Many local airsheds are Class I airsheds, meaning that they are managed to the highest standard and management agencies have an obligation to prevent degradation.

Importantly, western Colorado is already doing its part to produce natural gas for American consumers. There are close to 25,000 wells projected in two BLM field offices in northwestern Colorado in the next 15-20 years. That is half as many wells as currently exist statewide. The amount of gas coming out of this part of the State will continue at significant levels for the foreseeable future. There is no reason to open up lands on our most treasured National Forest at the same time.

The White River National Forest is too important for water production, recreation, tourism, and wildland values, and no additional leasing should take place there, I support Alternative B, which places nearly 1.5 million acres off limits to leasing, while the other alternatives would leave open at least a quarter of a million acres for future oil and gas leasing. If future leasing is allowed, any development should be restricted to areas that are already disturbed, and surface occupancy should be prohibited anywhere on the forest that is not already developed.

Please protect the beautiful White River National Forest. Western Colorado is doing its part!

Cecily Anne
63200 Percheron Court
Montrose, CO 81403