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Comments: Comments on WRNF DEIS leasing plan

To the U.S. Forest Service

I am writing to you again urgently to protect our roadless areas and the Thompson Divide from oil and gas drilling. We now have ample evidence that drilling, fracking, processing, and pipelines foul the air, the water, and the land. Oil and gas extraction fragment natural areas and destroy valuable wildlife habitat in our forests and the health of nearby communities by contaminating their drinking water and the air they must breathe.

But it's not just that the health of the local inhabitants is put at risk. Their economic health is at risk as well, since these areas derive much of their income from 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. Preserving these lands is even more important in the face of ceaseless development pressures and the changing climate.

The entire Thompson Divide 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.

Western Colorado is already producing natural gas for American consumers out of 50,000 wells currently and close to 25,000 wells projected in two BLM field offices in northwestern Colorado in the next 15-20 years. 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!

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