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Title:

Comments: We are writing to strongly support protecting the Thompson Divide. The 220,000-acre Thompson Divide just south of Carbondale is an invaluable resource for this area, Colorado, the west, and this country. It is an area that is too valuable to drill and so we are strongly supporting President Biden asking for an administrative mineral withdrawal for the Thompson Divide. Scenically spectacular with peaks and canyons, river valleys, forests, watersheds, and wide meadows, the Thompson Divide wilderness is rich in heritage and the natural resources of clean air and clean water.

The livelihood of so many Coloradoans are connected to this area through ranching, tourism, hunting, fishing, and recreation. The area provides a priceless scenic and pristine wilderness area for the many who cherish its remarkable environment. Protecting the Thompson Divide will help to ensure the long-term prosperity and healthy communities in western Colorado by preserving the Thompson Divide's plentiful wildlife and wildlife habitat, indispensable watersheds, clean water, clean air, rural and agricultural heritage, and recreational and sporting outdoor activities which help this local community thrive. The area has been recognized by the Colorado Division of Wildlife as critical migration corridor for moose, lynx, deer, elk, and mountain lions. Most importantly this area is one of the last great swaths of undeveloped-mid-elevation forest land in Colorado. Hikers, mountain bikers, horseback riders, campers, and anglers all enjoy this majestic wilderness area.

The Thompson Divide has more than 15 watersheds, supports 8,000 acres of cropland in the North Fork Valley, one of the most productive organic farming regions in the state. It also provides domestic and agricultural water for operations in the Crystal, Roaring Fork, and Colorado River valleys. The BLM must strongly consider impacts to threatened, endangered, and sensitive species that would threaten the local Thompson Divide if oil and gas leases were to be allowed or if leases continued to operate in this extraordinarily unspoiled and extremely important area. These sensitive species need our protection. Among the watershed in the Thompson Divide are Thompson Creek, Four Mile Creek, as well as portions of Muddy Basin, Coal Basin, and the headwaters of East Divide Creek. To safeguard these streams and their riparian habitat is crucial for our valley and the surrounding areas for the future.

The Thompson Divide is a fundamental component of traditional ranching in the Roaring Fork Valley. There are many ranching operations which use the Thompson Divide area for critical summer range on federal grazing permits from early June to mid-October. These ranches and allotments preserve thousands of acres of increasingly scarce winter range for deer and elk and thus play an essential role in the larger ecosystem. They are tremendously important for the ranching heritage going forward in our Roaring Fork valley.

We are strongly supporting protection in the Thompson Divide. We want to urge the BLM to support an administrative mineral withdrawal in the Thompson Divide covering more than 80,000 acres of spectacular, mostly roadless backcountry lands in and near the Thompson Divide.