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Comments: Is there a worse place in Nevada to lease for oil and gas than the gem of the state - the Ruby Mountains? Join with Friends of Nevada Wilderness to flatly oppose this misguided proposal.

The Ruby Mountains - located in northeastern Nevada outside Elko - provide critical habitat for Nevada's state fish, the Lahontan cutthroat trout, and one of the largest mule deer herds in the country. The proposed oil and gas leases overlap and threaten the integrity of three contiguous roadless areas, and overlap an additional 11,000 acres of the Pearl Peak Roadless Area, an area Friends of Nevada Wilderness has been working to protect as Wilderness for over 30 years.

Ms. Susan Elliott, Project Lead  
US Forest Service  
660 South 12th Street, Suite 108  
Elko, NV 89801

Ruby Mountains Oil & Gas Leasing Availability Analysis

Dear Ms. Elliott:

I am writing on behalf of the more than 850 members and supporters of Californians for Western Wilderness (CalUWild), a citizens organization dedicated to encouraging and facilitating participation in legislative and administrative actions affecting wilderness and other public lands in the West. Our members use and enjoy the public lands in Nevada and all over the West.

We appreciate this opportunity to comment on the possibility of the Forest Service making areas in the Ruby Mountains available to the US Bureau of Land Management for future oil and gas leasing.

We strongly oppose any proposal, let alone any thought, of leasing for oil & gas in the Ruby Mountains. We urge you in the strongest terms not to make any National Forest land in the Ruby Mountains available.

The Ruby Mountains are one of the premier wild places in Nevada, renowned for many, many years for their scenic beauty, wildlife, and recreational opportunities-hiking, photography, wildlife viewing, and hunting, among others.

There are three roadless areas that would be threatened in addition to 11,000 acres in the Pearl Peak Roadless Area, which citizens have been proposing for wilderness designation under the 1964 Wilderness Act. Leasing and development of oil & gas in the area would destroy any possibility for future wilderness designation.

There are more than enough leases on federal lands that have not been developed. Natural gas prices are low right now. There is no shortage of natural gas here in the United States. In short, there is no need for this land to be made available.

Should these conditions change, the Forest Service would always be free to reconsider. But if leased and developed, regardless of national necessity, the land cannot never be returned to its original state.

I'll restate: We are extremely strongly opposed to making these areas available for leasing. If for some reason the

USFS decides to allow the BLM to proceed, the stipulations mentioned in the original scoping letter MUST be made mandatory:

No Surface Occupancy for: Greater Sage Grouse Priority Habitat Management Areas; Occupied Lahontan Cutthroat Trout stream corridors; Lands with slopes greater than 40%; Occupied Rare Plant Habitat; Riparian habitats and wetlands

Controlled Surface Use for: Greater Sage Grouse General Habitat Management Areas; Inventoried Roadless Areas

Timing Limitation for: Crucial Mule Deer winter range; Active raptor nests; Migratory bird nesting areas

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please inform us of your decision in this matter and please also inform us of further opportunities to be involved in your public decision-making processes.

Sincerely,  
Michael J. Painter  
Coordinator