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Comments: Sagebrush in the lowlands surrounding the Ruby Mountains provides habitat for greater sage-grouse—a species that's in trouble throughout the West, in large part, due to rampant oil and gas drilling, which destroys and fragments the bird's habitat. The government is proposing to drill in lekking (mating) grounds and priority sage-grouse habitat where the birds are struggling to hang on. The Forest Service should fulfill its duty to conserve at-risk species like the greater sage-grouse.

The Ruby Mountains form a critical link in the Grand Canyon-Central Idaho wildlife corridor, which provides passage for mule deer, cougar, elk, bighorn sheep and mountain goats. In critical wildlife areas like the Rubies, the Forest Service should prioritize wildlife connectivity over fracking and energy extraction.

Fracking requires removing enormous amounts of water from watersheds, which coupled with spills, leaks and well failures, taint and degrade precious mountain streams, including several inhabited by the Lahontan cutthroat trout—a species protected under the federal Endangered Species Act as threatened. The Forest Service should be restoring watersheds to help recover threatened species, not pushing them closer to extinction.

Rare bighorn sheep live in the Ruby Mountains. They avoid human disturbance, including noise and temporary or permanent structures used in oil and gas operations. Oil and gas facilities fragment bighorn habitat, and reducing habitat connectivity can lead to genetic isolation and inbreeding. Oil and gas development would harm essential wintering habitat for one of the most significant herds of mule deer in Nevada. Rather than punishing these animals with development and habitat fragmentation, the Forest Service should be working to protect and enhance these iconic species that make the Ruby Mountains such a quintessentially Nevadan landscape.