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First name: Jean

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear State Director Vilsack, I am writing as a physician and public health/environmental protection advocate who strongly supports full protection for Wilderness sites throughout our country from any invasive and public health and environmentally destructive drilling for gas or oil by industrial fossil fuel companies. The Thompson Divide encompasses 221,000 acres of public land within the White River National Forest (filled with aspen and fir trees) in west-central Colorado and it is an essential part of Colorado's National Forest lands that contain some of the last fully intact forest ecosystems in the state and provide habitat for wildlife that includes herds of elk, cutthroat trout fisheries, black bear, bighorn sheep, Canadian lynx, and mule deer. I completely support the proposal to administratively withdraw the Thompson Divide in Colorado from new oil and gas development and mining for 20 years. For more than a decade, local elected officials, ranchers, recreationists, business owners, and other community members have advocated for safeguarding more than 220,000 acres of cherished public lands in and near the White River and Gunnison National Forests from industrial development. State and federal elected leaders have championed these permanent protections as part of the provisions in the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act. The Thompson Divide provides local communities and economies with water for residential and agricultural uses, essential habitat for wildlife, grazing allotments, and opportunities for outdoor recreation activities including hunting, fishing, hiking, mountain biking, climbing, and camping. While the CORE Act continues through the legislative process, an administrative mineral withdrawal for this area would provide interim protections for the landscape and certainty for communities. This Wilderness region contains magnificent backcountry recreation, and a crucial access to clean water for local community families. This area contains a dozen different roadless Wilderness areas that all now are facing the threat of further invasion by fossil fuel industrial oil and gas drilling companies and these irreplaceable Wilderness sites all lack permanent protection from the environmental destruction due to drilling wells from industrial fossil fuel companies. To ensure permanent protection for the irreplaceable Wilderness areas, the endangered wildlife and the communities that depend upon the ability to have access to these treasures and the ability to have clean, potable water to drink, I strongly urge the BLM to please adopt the proposed 20 year mineral withdrawal for Colorado's Thompson Divide. This proposed mineral withdrawal for Thompson Divide was proposed by President Biden as part of his announcement to establish Camp Hale as a national monument. I completely support this withdrawal because it would protect over 200,000 acres of public lands between the Roaring Fork and North Fork Valleys from oil and gas leasing for 20 years. This Wilderness region employs over 300 workers and local governments, ranchers, recreationalists, and business owners have been requesting such a withdrawal for over a decade. At this time, I thank you for your consideration of my letter and my request. I strongly support this federal proposal because it directs a hiatus on new mining and drilling leases while an environmental analysis of the site gets underway and is fully completed. Please understand that I support this proposal to ensure full protection for these magnificent Wilderness regions and the wildlife and communities who depend upon its existence for their survival. I respectfully request that you move these interim protections forward now, so that future generations will be able to enjoy the Thompson Divide. Thank you for the administration's commitment to celebrating and conserving Americans' connections to our incredible public lands and waters. I am very aware that the threat of industrial fossil fuel drilling has loomed large since the Bush administration recklessly leased the land, and I commend the Biden administration for taking action to repair that mistake. As a public health and environmental protection advocate, I strongly urge the BLM to please fully adopt the proposed mineral withdrawal. Sincerely, Jean Marie Naples, MD-Ph.D