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Comments: The Forest Service and BLM should close the Thompson Divide area to oil and gas leasing and mining for at least 20 years. The proposed Mineral Withdrawal would protect 225,000 acres of public lands from future oil and gas leasing, as well as mining. Benefits to air quality, wildlife habitat, watersheds, wilderness corridors, and our climate would be immediate and worthwhile.

As our country makes the time critical conversion of power sources for electricity generation and transportation, the US demand for fossil fuels will decline over those 20 years. While we accelerate our transition to renewables to avert the worst consequences of climate change, it makes all the more sense to protect areas of unique biological resource value from further oil/gas development. More than half the leases already granted by the BLM (including on National Forest surface) to oil/gas operators have not been developed, so any argument positing an economic urgency to continue to offer additional leases is fraudulent.

I urge the BLM and the Forest Service to finalize this withdrawal and consider making it permanent.

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