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Organization:

Title:

Comments: GMUG National Forest

Attn: Anthony Edwards, Deputy Forest Supervisor

As I have indicated before to Forest Service and BLM personnel, the proposed 20-year mineral withdrawal of the Thompson Divide should be affirmed by the Secretary of Interior, and ideally made permanent. The threat of oil and gas development and other possible mineral developments creates constant stress for residents of the watersheds originating on these precious lands.

I and my family have lived in the watershed of the North Fork of the Gunnison River for over 50 years, and I have been farming our land for most of that time. Having seen what damage oil and gas development has done to other parts of Colorado, we become quite agitated at the possibility that such will affect us here in the North Fork Valley. Our irrigation water originates on the lands under consideration and flows into the Paonia Reservoir and Fire Mountain Canal from Muddy Creek and its tributaries such as Lee Creek, from Coal Creek, and Anthracite Creek and their smaller tributaries. Oil and gas operations within a mile of any of these water sources would likely send pollutants into the North Fork of the Gunnison River and thus into my irrigation water and onto my fields and the agricultural lands of thousands of other local irrigators. Thus, anyone with agricultural interests in the North Fork watershed would favor the Thompson Divide Withdrawal. Agriculture is one of the main drivers of the economies of Delta, Montrose, and Gunnison Counties. However, it is only one of many contributors to the lifestyles, economies, and benefits of life in the area.

The lands under consideration for withdrawal provide some of the best hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and recreation opportunities in this state, if not the entire western U.S. Hunting, for example, generates millions of dollars every year to the economies of Delta, Gunnison, Pitkin, and Garfield Counties, all of which contain lands to be withdrawn or adjacent lands. Fishing is also a major contributor in these counties. Most people living in the area also value the ecological integrity and amazing biodiversity of the area. There is also the beautiful natural landscapes that contribute to the area's desirability. As I mentioned, I have farmed here a long time; but I made my living as a builder of fine and environmentally sensitive custom homes. Most of the homes I've built here were for families that moved here from out of the area to enjoy the area's beauty and amenities, all of which could be damaged by oil and gas and mineral development on the lands under consideration. I know one couple who moved here from the Silt, CO area just to get away from the extensive oil and gas development and resulting pollution, noise, and traffic in that area.

I have personally long been involved in the amenities offered by the Thompson Divide lands. For the past 52 years I've often fished, skied, climbed mountains, hiked, camped, birded, and watched other wildlife in the area. I've also helped to maintain the ecological integrity and bio-diversity there.

It is also very important that these lands will not be contributing to the negative effects of climate change by virtue of not being developed for oil and gas. Many more public lands need to be in the same category.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this brilliant and super-important proposal.

Sincerely,

Robin Nicholoff

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