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Comments: Comments on WRNF DEIS leasing plan

To the U.S. Forest Service

As the White River National Forest considers long-term plans for oil and gas leasing, you must protect our roadless areas

Oil and gas extraction including drilling, fracking, processing, and pipelines, threatens clean air, clean water, pristine and unfragmented natural areas, and valuable wildlife habitat in our forests and the health of nearby communities.

There are still many scientific unknowns about the extent of these risks or the methods to safeguard the environment and human health. I am concerned about the values at stake in the White River National Forest. Especially irrigation water sustaining local agriculture, the wildlife habitat, and the local economies that rely upon tourism and recreation.

I urge the Forest Service to place all roadless areas off limits for new leasing because of the road construction and fragmentation such leasing will ultimately cause. This was found essential by the national Roadless Rule to preserve the integrity of wild forests and protect habitat and drinking water from industrial development. Preserving these lands is even more important in the face of ceaseless development pressures and the changing climate.

In addition, the Forest Service must require the highest level of air pollution controls to protect the clean air for the forest, nearby communities, and natural wonders in the area like the world-famous Maroon Bells. Many local airsheds are Class I airsheds, meaning that they are managed to the highest standard and management agencies have an obligation to prevent degradation.

Importantly, western Colorado is already doing its part to produce natural gas for American consumers. There are close to 25,000 wells projected in two BLM field offices in northwestern Colorado in the next 15-20 years. That is half as many wells as currently exist statewide. The amount of gas coming out of this part of the State will continue at significant levels for the foreseeable future. There is no reason to open up lands on our most treasured National Forest at the same time. If, in 40 or more years down the road we need this resource - leaving it in the ground for future generations is the best approach. Why should we sacrifice our natural environment for instant gratification, and leave nothing in our legacy.

The White River National Forest is too important for water production, recreation, tourism, and wildland values, and no additional leasing should take place there, I support Alternative B, which places nearly 1.5 million acres off limits to leasing, while the other alternatives would leave open at least a quarter of a million acres for near future oil and gas leasing. If leasing is allowed in the next 10-20 years, any development should be restricted to areas that are already disturbed, and surface occupancy should be prohibited anywhere on the forest that is not already developed.

Please protect the beautiful White River National Forest. Western Colorado is doing its part!

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