

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 27, 2026

Forest Supervisor Dawn Laybolt
Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and
Thunder Basin National Grassland
3838 Cherrywood East Loop
Laramie, WY 82070

Dear Forest Supervisor Laybolt,

We write to express our concern with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS)'s Routt National Forest Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), proposing to lease 10 parcels in northwest Routt and Moffat Counties in Colorado, to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The USFS has received Expressions of Interest to lease these 13,850 acres to the BLM for potential future oil and gas lease, exploration, and development, and initiated a public comment period last month.

Local leaders, including Routt County, members of the Steamboat Springs City Council, and the Western Resilience Center, have expressed concerns with this proposed lease. Six of the 10 parcels currently under consideration within the EA contain sensitive watersheds, and two contain cutthroat trout habitat. These proposed parcels also overlap significantly with habitat and migration corridors for elk, mule deer, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, golden eagles, and more.

The proposed lease of these areas for future oil and gas development threatens to disrupt critical wildlife habitats and wildlife migrating and living throughout the region, in addition to degrading important watersheds. These parcels overlap with the California Park Special Interest Area, an area of critical ecological significance for Northwest Colorado and where there is active watershed restoration work underway in collaboration with the USFS.

These areas are also important for recreation, and the outdoor recreation economy is a significant economic driver for Routt County and the surrounding communities. Several existing multi-use trails overlap with the proposed parcels, in addition to areas that are valuable for hunting and fishing. Prior oil and gas development efforts within Routt County have historically not been economically viable or demonstrated commercial viability in the areas proposed for lease. We are concerned that this proposed action would significantly jeopardize the existing economic drivers for the region, including outdoor recreation.

We are also concerned that Routt County was not notified of this proposed action prior to the agency's announcement. Any proposed leasing actions should be accompanied by significant and meaningful public and community engagement, including with the local jurisdictions that would be impacted.

As you consider the proposed lease of these lands to the BLM, we request you take full and fair consideration of the concerns raised by the impacted community and the highest and best use of these public lands.

Sincerely,



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator

cc: Michael Woodbridge, District Ranger, Hahns Peak-Bears Ears Ranger District