

SPORTSMEN FOR **Responsible Energy Development**

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Helen Hankins, State Director
Bureau of Land Management
2850 Youngfield Street
Lakewood, Colorado 80215

Dave Stout, Field Manager
Kremmling Field Office
Bureau of Land Management
2103 East Park Avenue
Kremmling, Colorado 80459

Dear Director Hankins and Field Manager Stout:

As hunters, anglers and wildlife watchers who take pride in Colorado's world-class wildlife populations, we have a special affinity for those few places that retain some measure of the wildness and undeveloped landscape of the Rocky Mountain West. That is why our organizations are formally asking the Colorado office of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to make the long-term protection of North Park in Jackson County a priority before major energy development changes the character of this special part of the American West.

The storms that plow into the Continental Divide to the west dump some of Colorado's deepest snow pack, feeding the North Platte River that course through the middle of the North Park. To the east, the Medicine Bow Mountains are the source for the Michigan and Illinois rivers that flow into the North Platte River. These creeks and streams contribute to a Gold Medal fishery on the North Platte and are what make popular fishing destinations such as Lake John, Walden Reservoir and the Delaney Butte Lakes possible. The Colorado Division of Wildlife annually stocks all of these waters with tens of thousands of trout that provide fishing recreation for thousands of anglers each year. The health of this watershed is also important for anglers across the border as the North Platte River flows into Wyoming.

The area is also prime big game habitat. The mountains on both sides of the North Park offer some of the West's best elk hunting along with pronghorn and mule deer. There are important migration routes for animals that move across the border between Colorado and Wyoming. The lakes and streams provide fabulous habitat for waterfowl during the fall migration, including on the Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge south of Walden. Much of North Park is also critical habitat for greater sage grouse, a candidate species for listing under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

As one veteran wildlife manager said: "For someone who loves wildlife, hunting and fishing, you can't find a better place."

But this sparsely populated area that has long been known for ranching, hunting and fishing is now in the crosshairs of energy companies. Oil trapped within the Niobrara Formation thousands of feet below North Park, along with potentially large supplies of natural gas, has prompted new leasing and drilling. These leases lie in key habitats for grouse, deer, pronghorn, elk and trout.

In the most basic sense, North Park, one of the West's last lonely landscapes that still retain much of their native habitat and hunting and fishing traditions, is at risk. For this reason, our organizations are asking BLM to begin an immediate and formal process that will ensure that the needs of native wildlife and the habitats they need to survive are fully factored in before energy development begins, not as an afterthought.

As Westerners, we understand that energy development should and will occur. We support responsible energy development. Yet the companies now leasing and drilling in North Park must be required to engage in a careful process that ensures that local landowners, state and federal wildlife managers and land management agencies have the opportunity to participate in planning and make specific recommendations on where, how and when energy exploration, drilling and production occurs.

Many of the companies now developing the West's energy resources have shown they have the knowledge and capital to use the best and newest technology to avoid and reduce the impacts of energy development. They have made great strides with directional drilling, using closed-loop systems for produced water, drilling multiple wells from a single pad and installing remote devices to reduce the number and frequency of vehicles on the roads leading to wells.

Yet even with these remarkable technological breakthroughs, the BLM must consider reducing access or even preventing drilling, particularly in habitat critical for big game migration, winter survival and fawning and calving areas. Drilling near riparian areas along North Park's lakes, rivers and streams needs to be carefully managed, with appropriate setbacks.

As hunters, anglers and wildlife watchers, we expect our federal agencies to recognize the importance of wildlife-based recreation to local economies and our Western heritage and traditions.

Wildlife-based recreation contributes more than \$14 million annually to the Jackson County economy, an impressive amount for a small county with only 1,200 residents. And the economic impacts of healthy wildlife populations will only grow in importance, providing we act as stewards of the land, wildlife and our hunting and fishing traditions and heritage.

We can only have both responsible energy development and our abundant wildlife resource if BLM requires companies to examine and fully factor in the cumulative impacts of energy development to wildlife. The appropriate local and state agencies must be fully involved in preparing comprehensive development plans, wildlife mitigation plans and other regulatory protections.

If we're to save these last wild places, we need our federal agencies to develop, enact and enforce a regulatory structure that allows energy development without sacrificing what's best about those places we cherish.

Sincerely,

Kathleen C. Zimmerman
Senior Policy Advisor
National Wildlife Federation

Bill Dvorak
Colorado Public Lands Organizer
National Wildlife Federation

Suzanne B. O'Neill
Executive Director
Colorado Wildlife Federation

Courtney Amerine
Field Organizer
Wyoming Wildlife Federation

Steve Belinda
Director, Center for Responsible
Development
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation
Partnership

Nick Payne
Colorado Field Representative
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation
Partnership

Neil Thagard
Western Energy Coordinator
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation
Partnership

Brad Powell
Energy Director
Trout Unlimited

Bob Meulengracht
Colorado SFRED Coordinator
Trout Unlimited

David Nickum
Executive Director
Colorado Trout Unlimited

Gaspar Perricone
Tim Mauck
Co-Directors
Bull Moose Sportsmen's Alliance

Ivan James
Vice Chairman Legislation
Colorado Bowhunters Association

