WESTERN LEADERS NETWORK CALLS ON COLORADO BLM TO DELAY ACTION ON OIL AND GAS LEASES ENDANGERING GREATER SAGE GROUSE

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On behalf of 275 local and tribal elected officials across the Interior West – including 140 in Colorado – Western Leaders Network urges the Colorado Bureau of Land Management to defer action on the federal oil and gas lease sale of almost 79,000 acres slated for September, as it puts greater sage-grouse habitat at risk as well as critical winter range and migration corridors for elk, deer and other wildlife.

The proposed leasing areas span eight Colorado counties – including Garfield, Jackson, Moffat, Rio Blanco, Routt, Cheyenne, Kiowa and Weld – and 77 percent of it encompasses sage-grouse habitat, according to the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. The sale conflicts with the agency’s commitment to prioritize energy development outside of sage grouse habitat.

“There were once millions of greater sage-grouse throughout the West, and now that population is estimated to be less than half a million. The bird’s habitat and the livelihoods sagebrush lands support are far too important to put at risk,” Routt County Commissioner Tim Corrigan said. “BLM agreed earlier this year in Colorado’s sage grouse management plans that grouse habitat would be prioritized over oil and gas development. The agency should keep its promise and delay action on these parcels so we can ensure protection of our public lands and wildlife.”

Considered an indicator species that reflects the overall health of sagebrush ecosystems, the greater-sage grouse avoided a listing under the Endangered Species Act in 2015 when western states adopted collaborative conservation management plans for the species. The Interior Department under the Trump administration released revised plans in early 2019, weakening protections for the grouse and opening up critical habitat to mining and drilling.

BLM accepted public comments on the leases until 4 p.m. Wednesday.

Western Leaders Network is a nonpartisan nonprofit that unites, supports and cultivates local and tribal elected officials across the Interior West to advocate for the protection of public lands, air, water and public health, and build healthy, sustainable communities.
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