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A cry for help from the West

More than 100 elected officials in US western states have called on President-elect Joe Biden, Deb Haaland, and Congress in a letter, asking them to protect lands, fight the climate crisis, and support western communities.

The letter, which [can be read here](#) on The Mountain Pact's website, who organized the letter, includes calls to halt new oil and gas leases and industry bailouts; support local governments in relief packages; restore protections for Bears Ears and Grand Staircase Escalante national monuments and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; increase environmental and public health safeguards; and work to conserve 30% of US lands and waters by 2030.

Here's an excerpt from the letter:

Our communities are shouldering the burden of increased unemployment, added public lands infrastructure needs, and costly climate impacts. To address this untenable situation, the Biden administration and the new Congress should prioritize adopting reforms that will reverse the devastating impacts that the "energy dominance" agenda has had on Western mountain communities over the past four years. Public lands should no longer be given away for pennies on the dollar, financial support should be provided to local governments amidst the pandemic, and meaningful actions should be taken to both address the climate crisis and protect our public lands.

Some local officials weighed in on how climate change has affected their communities.

Mayor Jonathan Godes of Glenwood Springs, Colorado, said: 2020 was a hard year for Glenwood Springs. Between the [quarry expansion](#) and the [Grizzly Creek Fire](#), our community has been dramatically impacted by a warming planet and the extraction industry. Our Federal government should prioritize helping small communities

and businesses across the country, and focus on the new renewable energy economy.

Town of Hailey, Idaho council member Kaz Thea, said:

We have had significant wildfire impacts in our community and our entire community has been evacuated twice from large wildfires in the past several years. We have also seen flood impacts and early snow run off with spring conditions coming earlier and nights are overall warmer so our snow does not last as long. We have also been trending in a drought condition for many years which has impacted insect and disease infestation in our forests which then also increases wildfire risk. It's a vicious cycle. Our mountain community will eventually lose its snow and lose our livelihood as being a skiing mountain town based on tourism if we do not reverse the impacts of climate change.

City of Moab, Utah Council Member Kalen Jones said:

COVID has been hard for a number of reasons and our community could use smarter federal help. Stimulus money, especially for small businesses and local governments, is still needed as we progress through the pandemic. Pre-2020 our vibrant economy was built on visitation to our beautiful public lands. Royalty relief and rampant leasing to subsidize fossil fuels sends counterproductive market signals, undermines Moab's economy, is a distraction for our staff, council, and nonprofit partners, and is counter to our efforts to avoid the worst case outcomes of climate change.