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## Guest commentary: Protecting public lands gets support with Pitkin County resolutions

Opinion **OPINION** | May 28, 2021

**Kelly McNicholas Kury**  
Guest commentary

Earlier this month, as chair of the Pitkin County Board of Commissioners, I was proud to introduce and see our board support two important resolutions which endorsed the “Campaign to Protect 30% of US Lands and Waters by 2030” and “President Biden’s Temporary Pause on Oil and Gas Leasing on Public Lands.”

If you’re not familiar, the Campaign to Protect 30% of US Lands and Waters by 2030 is commonly called 30×30. It’s a bold conservation vision, backed by science, that seeks to address both the climate and biodiversity crisis we’re currently facing. A 2020 “Colorado Pathways to 30×30” report calls for Colorado to protect and restore at least 14 million more acres of lands and waters by 2030 — not a small endeavor to be sure, but one I firmly believe we can and must accomplish. Here in Pitkin County, where we’re surrounded by undeveloped and public lands, we have a chance to do more than our part to make this vision a reality.

Climate science shows that large, intact and connected landscapes — such as those frequently found on public lands — are critical for our planet to successfully adapt to a changing climate. These lands can increase ecosystem and wildlife resiliency in a warming climate, mitigate harmful greenhouse gas emissions, and provide clean air and water. Adding new protections to lands and waters must be a core strategy in achieving the ambitious, but necessary goal of saving nature to fight climate change.

Pitkin County has long been an environmental leader, both in Colorado and nationally, and 30×30 gives us a chance to continue to lead. For decades, we’ve supported Wilderness and Roadless designations; my predecessors created Rural and Remote Zoning, worked with groups such as the Thompson Divide Coalition and Wilderness Workshop to protect the Thompson Divide, and created beloved county programs like Open Space & Trails and Healthy Rivers & Streams. Achieving the vision set out by 30×30 will require us to continue to nurture and grow

these existing programs, while also seeking additional protections like Wild and Scenic Designation for the Crystal River and for the abundant public lands in our backyard.

Our 30x30 efforts must be equitable and inclusive. Historically, the conservation community has too often excluded people of color and Indigenous communities from the conversation. 30x30 offers an important opportunity to ensure that moving forward, our work to protect landscapes and preserve nature involves partnerships with diverse communities and tribes. Also this month, the Biden-Harris Administration released a “Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful” report that outlines ways in which to do just that.

While Pitkin County’s resolution supports action taken at the federal level, it’s the potential impact here on the ground that gives me the most hope. 2030 may seem like a long way away but speaking as both a public servant and as a parent, nothing is truer than time passing quicker than we think. Both of these roles are part of why I feel so passionately about acting on the climate and nature crisis. Moving forward, I look forward to working with community members, nonprofits and other elected officials to ensure these resolutions live up to their potential. I hope you’ll join me.

*Kelly McNicholas Kury was elected in 2018 and is in her first term as the District 2 representative on the Pitkin County Board of Commissioners.*