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BLM must take action to address climate impacts

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By JONATHAN GODES

As a mayor who represents a community within the Colorado River Valley Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Field Office, I want to welcome the BLM leadership team and members of the Public Lands Foundation to western Colorado. I recently joined fellow local elected officials in our region to urge the BLM to reduce federal oil and gas leasing on BLM lands within our communities, as well as to take steps to administratively protect lands with wilderness characteristics and areas of environmental concern through BLM planning processes. Doing so will protect some of our communities' critical water resources, Indigenous cultural sites, important wildlife habitat, and treasured recreation areas.

Many of the BLM lands located in our region are favorites for visitors and residents alike for camping, fishing, mountain biking and hiking. Yet, many of these areas were left open to oil and gas leasing in the 2015 Resource Management Plan.

While the Bureau of Land Management is completing a more thorough analysis of the impacts of federal oil and gas development on our climate and communities, I, and my colleagues, urged them to consider that fossil fuel extraction on public lands generates 25% of the United States' climate change causing emissions.

Our communities are now facing year-long wildfire seasons, drought, flooding and extreme weather. By protecting our public lands and reducing oil and gas leasing, we can increase conservation to mitigate the incredibly expensive and devastating climate crisis that is significantly impacting our communities, local agriculture, outdoor recreation and tourism economies, as well as our public health and well-being.

Our nation's protected public lands are tremendous assets to our western communities. They play a critical role in our way of life. They help make the communities where we live what they are while contributing to a healthier and better tomorrow for future generations.

The Bureau of Land Management has an opportunity to embrace the America the Beautiful initiative and help conserve and restore more of our nation's lands and waters for residents,

wildlife and future generations. Limiting oil and gas development on BLM lands, identifying and protecting additional Lands with Wilderness Characteristics, as well as increasing the designations of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) is essential to providing continued opportunities for outdoor recreation, equitable access to nature, and ultimately safeguarding the climate.

Some specific lands within our communities that would benefit from greater protections, among others, by the BLM are: Red Hill and The Crown Special Recreation Management Areas; Areas of Critical Environmental Concern like Bull Gulch and Grand Hogback; and Lands with Wilderness Characteristics like Castle Peak, Deep Creek, Hack Lake, and Thompson Creek.

As the largest land manager in the nation, the Bureau of Land Management must play a leading role in protecting our public lands for the future. Of Coloradans, 75% “think that oil and gas development on national public lands should be stopped or strictly limited, as opposed to expanded.”

We must take action now to avoid the increasing and extremely costly catastrophic climate impacts that are harming our communities. We look forward to working with the Bureau of Land Management and their forward-looking analysis that will ensure greater protections for BLM lands and waters in and near our communities.

Jonathan Godes is the mayor of Glenwood Springs.