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100+ Elected Officials Across the West Call on the Incoming Biden Administration and 117th Congress to Fight the Climate Crisis, Protect Public Lands, & Support Western Communities Following Years of Environmental Turmoil

COLORADO -- After four years of catastrophic environmental policy that has damaged our nation's public lands and communities, over 100 local elected officials across the West are calling on the incoming Biden administration and 117th Congress to address the climate crisis, protect public lands, and support Western mountain communities.

A [letter](#) sent today to President-elect Biden, Congress, and Representative Deb Haaland 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 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030. The letter was organized by [The Mountain Pact](#).

The letter states: *"While the catastrophic COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult for our Western mountain communities, our public lands have also been a bright spot, providing a refuge from the pandemic with our residents and visitors finding solace in the outdoors more than ever. Public lands are the backbone of our mountain communities and vital for our way of life. As local elected officials tasked with helping our regions' economies recuperate, we know that protecting our public lands and outdoor recreation opportunities, along with taking bold climate action, will boost the economy as we recover from the impacts of COVID-19."*

SEE THE FULL LETTER AND LIST OF SIGNERS HERE: <http://www.themountainpact.org/biden-transition-letter>

In conjunction with the letter, The Mountain Pact also released a new report titled [**"Building Back Better: How Congress and the Biden Administration Can Support Climate Resilient Western Mountain Communities & Reverse the Damage Caused by the Trump Administration."**](#) The report details how big oil and gas industry bailouts; weakened environmental regulations; and the [elimination of environmental reviews](#) as part of the Trump Administration's "energy dominance" agenda, have jeopardized public lands and public health. The prioritization of antiquated energy source development over the past four years has exacerbated the climate crisis by causing the release of vast amounts of potent greenhouse gas emissions. This increase in climate emissions directly affects Western mountain communities that are dealing with several dire, long-term, and costly health and climate impacts.

SEE THE REPORT HERE: <http://www.themountainpact.org/buildingbackbetter>

Anna Peterson, Executive Director of The Mountain Pact, said, *"The Biden Administration and 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, the backbone of many of our mountain communities, should no longer be given away for pennies on the dollar, financial support should be provided to local governments amidst the pandemic, and additional meaningful actions should be taken to address the climate crisis."*

MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY ELECTED OFFICIAL QUOTES

IDAHO:

Mayor Hyrum Johnson of the Town of Driggs, Idaho, said, *“Over the last decade we've witnessed shorter winters, the ensuing worries about irrigation water for local agriculture, and a negative impact to our winter tourism businesses. We've also experienced extreme impacts from wildfires which impacts our summer tourism season and 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.”*

UTAH:

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 non-profit partners, and is counter to our efforts to avoid the worst case outcomes of climate change.”*

Town of Alta, Utah Assistant Town Administrator Chris Cawley said, *“Alta is a pure ski town. We have very little economy other than what is generated by ski area visitation. Impacts from climate change threaten not just local ski conditions and economic activity, but Utah's ski industry as a whole and all of the benefits it provides to Utah communities. Ski area communities need to plan futures that are less dependent on winter snowpack and cold temperatures.”*

COLORADO:

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 Paonia, Colorado Trustee Dave Knutson, said: *“The biggest threat to our community of Paonia is climate change, exacerbated by the Bureau of Land Management's new Management Plan for the area. By opening up all nearby public lands to drilling instead of honoring our rural community's input. By increasing climate emissions, we are accelerating impacts that hurt our community. This year's drought required some of our irrigation ditches to be shut down prematurely due to “calls” on the water systems. Lack of irrigation water impacted our fruit and organic vegetable crops where we grow over half of the organic food for the State of Colorado. And finally, lack of snow has impacted recreation and has decreased capacity for irrigation which is critical to our ranchers and farmers.”*

City of Steamboat Springs, Colorado Council Member Sonja Macys said, *“We are often overtaken by dust and ash from nearby fires each summer which makes outdoor recreation nearly impossible due to the danger and the greatly diminished air quality. We also continue to see Yampa River flows fall to dangerously low levels. For the past decade*

we've purchased additional water from the Stagecoach Reservoir for strategic water releases to keep the river alive. This year the Yampa River was placed on call for only the second time in its history. We need the federal government to prioritize communities over failing industries."

Town of Telluride Pro Tem Mayor Todd Brown said, *"In my home in Southwest Colorado, we are again experiencing exceptional drought and seeing the long-term impacts of climate change that threaten our tourism-based economy. I am a ski instructor at our world-class ski resort whose seasons are experiencing less snowfall, warmer temperatures, and earlier melting in the spring. That earlier and faster snowmelt is impacting our water-based summer tourism, as well as the health of our surrounding forests. Sitting on the edge of the Four Corners Methane Hotspot, we experience more days of atmospheric haze every year, exacerbated by wildfire smoke as our drying climate contributes to longer and more intense wildfires."*

City of Aspen Mayor Torre, said, *"Aspen's ecosystems and tourism economy are heavily dependent on winter snowfall. Higher average temperatures over recent decades have shortened the winter season, resulting in a diminished snowpack. These changes to the snowpack have contributed to more consistent and severe drought conditions in the summers, as well as an increase in wildfire danger."*

Mayor Corrinne Platt of the Town of Ophir, Colorado, said, *"We're seeing less snow and less runoff which is our primary municipal water source. Last fall we had a fire within a mile of our town limit. We need to be looking forward to help out small communities, not a polluting and antiquated industry."*

Mayor Hunter Mortensen Town of Frisco, Colorado, said, *"Energy development on public lands really impacts our snowpack from the dust on snow events, which then leads to difficult water management for our town water supply. Furthermore, the faster the snow melts off from the dust events, the drier the forests become, increasing our wildfire risk and catastrophic potential impacts to our town."*

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Founded in 2014, [The Mountain Pact](#) mobilizes local elected officials in over 80 Western mountain communities with outdoor recreation based economies to speak with a collective voice on federal climate, public lands, and outdoor recreation policy.