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ADVOCATES**

For Immediate Release
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Improper Oil and Gas Leases in Colorado Roadless Areas Invalidated

CARBONDALE, CO – The Bureau of Land Management invalidated three oil and gas leases in roadless areas of National Forest that had been unlawfully included in a public auction. The parcels, totaling over 2,000 acres, are located in the Thompson Creek Divide and Reno Mountain Inventoried Roadless Areas in western Colorado. In placing these areas up for mineral leasing, the Bureau of Land Management illegally disregarded U.S. Forest Service policy that prohibits surface-disturbing activities in roadless areas.

Roadless areas are the last vestiges of virgin forest left. They are enormously valuable because they offer wildlife intact ecosystems, the pristine watersheds are excellent sources of clean water, and the unlogged timber stands are healthier and more resistant to catastrophic wildfires.

"These leases never should have been issued in the first place," stated Western Resource Advocates Lands Program Director Mike Chiropolos. "Colorado's wild forests should be protected for wildlife habitat and headwaters streams, instead of opened up to drill pads and roads. We appreciate the agency decision to void the leases following our legal victory."

Roadless areas have significant benefits for people as well. The intact watershed preserves water quality for downstream users, and many local residents depend on these federal lands for their livelihood. The area's recreation benefits are a draw for locals and tourists who bolster the region's economy.

"This is a huge victory for a wild landscape. As part of the largest swath of unprotected roadless land left in the state, this area deserves protection," said the Wilderness Workshop's Peter Hart. "Unfortunately, there are still about 40 leases within inventoried roadless areas in this geography that haven't been cancelled. These leases must be eliminated if we're serious about protecting the outstanding ecological values at stake."

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Almost half of the approximately 200,000 acres in the Thompson Divide area is under lease for oil and gas development. Building the roads and infrastructure required to drill area would have a devastating impact on the wildlife, water quality, rural character and agricultural heritage of our community.

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Western Resource Advocates is a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to protecting the West's land, air and water. Visit us online at www.westernresourceadvocates.org.