

**Coalition to Protect America's National Parks • Colorado Fiscal Institute
Colorado Wildlands Project • Conservation Colorado
Conservation Lands Foundation • Earthjustice • Friends of the Earth
Friends of the Missouri Breaks Monument • Grand Canyon Trust
Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting and the Outdoors (HECHO)
League of Conservation Voters • League of Oil and Gas Impacted Coloradans (LOGIC)
Montana Conservation Voters Education Fund • Montana Wildlife Federation
Mountain Mamas • National Parks Conservation Association • National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council • Nevada Wildlife Federation • Public Citizen
Public Land Solutions • Rocky Mountain Wild • Sierra Club
The Wilderness Society • Vet Voice Foundation • Western Organization of Resource Councils
Western Colorado Alliance • Wild Montana • Wilderness Workshop
Upper Missouri Waterkeeper**

October 5, 2021

Dear Senator:

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters we encourage you to support Senator Hickenlooper's *Competitive Onshore Mineral Policy via Eliminating Taxpayer-Enabled Speculation ("COMPETES") Act* and urge you to advocate for its inclusion in the reconciliation bill. This legislation would end the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) wasteful practice of selling oil and gas leases at rock-bottom prices without a competitive bid. The practice robs taxpayers of a fair return on a public resource, wastes agency time and resources, and prevents the consideration of other values and uses on millions of acres of public land in the West.

Federal land oil and gas leases that go unsold by competitive bid remain available for purchase for two years. Leases can be bought over-the-counter for just \$1.50 per acre and a nominal filing fee. Most of these leases are purchased by entities with no intent to develop them—in violation of federal statute—and just 3 percent are developed within 10 years. Furthermore, more than half of non-competitive leases sold, covering 1.6 million acres of public land, end up terminated by the BLM within two years—usually for nonpayment of rental fees. Some purchasers fail to make even an initial payment. The BLM has the smallest budget of the land management agencies, and its workforce is stretched thin. It does not have spare resources to needlessly prepare sales and administer leases that the free market has rejected and no one wants.

In addition to the artificially low purchase price, non-competitive leases are not subject to bonus bids. Analysis by Taxpayers for Common Sense suggests that non-competitive leasing costs the American public millions of dollars a year in forgone revenue. It is evident that taxpayers do not get a proper rate of return, and agency resources are largely wasted, on the non-competitive lease program. The American people deserve better from their government.

Multiple-use land management suffers from millions of acres encumbered by oil and gas leases, and ranching and other uses of private split estate lands over federal minerals are impeded as well. For the 10-year lease term professional land managers are prevented from recommending these lands for conservation, recreation, or other purposes in the planning process. In at least one case the

agency failed to recommend protecting wildlife habitat and natural resources on *unleased* land in part to prevent limiting access to leased land. The opportunity for Americans to use their public lands, and prudent management of our treasured natural resources, is compromised with nearly 30 million acres of land constrained by leases—many of them without necessity or legitimate reason.

Passage of the *COMPETES Act* would remedy these ills and create a more efficient and better run BLM. It would release millions of acres of needlessly leased land; to be more fully enjoyed by the American public, and managed for the full range of resource options and uses. We ask you to please support this legislation and, as reconciliation discussions continue, urge you to support its inclusion in that process.

Please do not hesitate to contact us about this important issue.

Sincerely,

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