

left in the West and across Colorado – with all of the development already taking place is the state why would the BLM even consider sacrificing this area?”

Critical undisturbed areas within Little Snake include the Vermillion Basin, which is the largest contiguous block of unleased federal land within the Little Snake area, as well as six other citizen-proposed wilderness areas such as Diamond Breaks and Cold Spring Mountain, together totaling roughly 275,000 acres. These amazing landscapes are home to invaluable cultural resources, rolling rivers, breathtaking hiking routes, and fertile hunting grounds.

“Moffat County has long depended on the hunting and tourism industry to sustain our economy. When other parts of western Colorado suffered from the boom and bust cycle of the oil industry, Moffat County continued to thrive as an outdoor enthusiast’s destination location.” said Rick Hammel, a former Moffat County Land Use Board member and area resident. “If BLM chooses to adopt a dense drilling plan for Little Snake Resource Area it will jeopardize the very lands that maintain our way of life.”

Already over 60 percent of the Little Snake Resource Area is leased for oil and gas drilling although much has yet to be developed, and local residents and conservation groups are questioning the need to open additional lands, including special places such as proposed wilderness areas, for drilling. [Scientific analysis](#) by The Wilderness Society found that the proposed wilderness lands in the Little Snake, including the sought-after Vermillion Basin, contain only enough technically recoverable gas to supply US energy needs for about 11 days, and less than 50 minutes worth of oil; when economic factors are considered, this amount would be much less.

“The oil and gas industry already has access to huge swaths of the Little Snake Resource Area,” added Jones. “Is it so much to ask that some special places, such as Vermillion Basin, be left alone for wildlife, hunters, hikers and future generations to enjoy just as they are today?”

Vermillion Basin also contains Native American petroglyphs, desert canyons, and beautiful and delicate badlands. The Colorado Natural Heritage Areas program has identified 16 Potential Conservation Areas for rare plants and plant communities within Vermillion Basin.

“We are so fortunate in northwest Colorado to have one of the best outdoor classrooms in the state,” said David Morris a middle school teacher in Craig. “Students have the opportunity to not only learn about our past, but about how the choices we make today and impact the landscape in years to come.”

Locals and conservationists are urging the BLM to improve the Little Snake draft plan by including provisions to:

- Preserve Vermilion Basin and other citizen-proposed wilderness areas by protecting them from oil and gas leasing and development, off-road vehicles, and other actions that would impair wilderness character;
- Maintain existing Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) and designate new ACECs to protect sensitive resource values (including rare plants);

- Require that any energy development is done responsibly and in an environmentally sensitive manner that protects wildlife and other rare, unique, and vulnerable natural and historical resources;
- Protect Wild and Scenic character of eligible segments of Yampa River, Beaver Creek and Vermillion Creek; and
- Better manage recreation by restricting off-road vehicles to designated roads in order to minimize environmental impacts and social conflicts, and by providing for a balance of “quiet” recreation opportunities as well.

For more information and area maps, please visit:

www.southernrockies.org/LSFO, or www.savevermillion.org

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