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January 26, 2022

The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20250

**RE: Request to Block Forest Service Right of Way That Will Undermine President Biden's Climate Goals**

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

The undersigned groups representing millions of supporters working to protect our climate, national forests, and communities from the climate emergency request that you stop the United States Forest Service's plan to approve a right-of-way through the Ashley National Forest that

would enable construction of the proposed Uinta Basin Railway resulting in a quadrupling of fossil fuel extraction in the Uinta Basin and degrading a National Forest roadless area. The Forest Service deadline for resolving our objections to the draft record of decision is February 3, 2022.

This new railway and the oil trains it will facilitate, will cause 53 million tons of carbon pollution a year to be emitted into the atmosphere, equal to six dirty coal plants, and otherwise do tremendous harm to the environment, including increasing the risk of oil train and climate driven wildfires.

The stated purpose of the railway and the financial basis for it, is to quadruple fossil fuel extraction in Utah's Uinta Basin from the current level of 80,000 barrels per day, to 350,000 barrels per day. Further, because the proposed rail line is intended to transport crude oil to Gulf Coast refineries, the project will adversely affect disproportionately impacted communities already exposed to particularly elevated levels of air and water pollution.

Many of the undersigned organizations have communicated our concerns to the United States Forest Service prior to issuing draft approval of the right of way, including to the Ashley National Forest Supervisor, and Forest Service Chief Randy Moore.

We were astonished by Chief Moore's [response letter](#) to us in support of the project that characterized the railway as comporting with President Biden's Executive Order 14008 concerning the climate crisis. Specifically Chief Moore wrote that: "The Forest Supervisor determined the proposed use of the project **is in the public interest and supports President Joseph R. Biden's policies outlined in Executive Order 14008 to rebuild our infrastructure for a sustainable economy.**"

Chief Moore is incorrect—the Uinta Basin Railway directly conflicts with the President's order.

Executive Order 14008, "Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad" sets as U.S. policy the goal of "significant short-term reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and net-zero global emissions by mid-century or before." To that end, President Biden has set a goal to reduce U.S. emissions by 50-52% from 2005 levels by 2030, just eight years away. Section 213 of E.O. 14008 further states that the administration "shall take steps, consistent with applicable law, to ensure that Federal infrastructure investment reduces climate pollution, and to require that Federal permitting decisions consider the effects of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change." And, section 201, of E.O. 14008, further states that "It is the policy of my Administration to organize and deploy the full capacity of its agencies to combat the climate crisis to implement a Government-wide approach that reduces climate pollution in every sector of the economy...).

Contrary to E.O. 14008, the intended purpose and stated goal of the railway is to *increase fossil fuel extraction on public lands in the Uinta Basin*. Increased drilling and extraction the railway seeks to induce will boost greenhouse pollution at every step in the process: from extraction, to transportation, to refining, to combustion. The infrastructure investment solely enabled by the issuance of this discretionary right-of-way thus contradicts the President’s stated climate policy.

In addition to worsening the climate crisis, the railway would cause irreversible environmental damage. According to the environmental analysis that the Forest Service relies on, the Uinta Basin Railway would alter more than 400 Utah streams and strip bare or build on 10,000 acres of wildlife habitat, including areas on Forest Service land designated as “crucial” habitat for bighorn, deer, and elk. In Emma Park, a remote sagebrush valley known to birdwatchers, bulldozers and train traffic would drive imperiled greater sage grouse out of their mating and nesting grounds and, it is feared, wipe them out from the region. Virtually the entirety of the railway on the Ashley National Forest, totaling 12 miles, would be built in an inventoried roadless area protected by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, and according to the Forest Service, degrade roadless area values by building five bridges and blasting three tunnels up to 2100 feet wide.

The railway will also inflict harm downstream where the trains would be headed through Colorado to Gulf Coast refineries at a time when western states are reeling from drought, wildfires and pollution caused by the climate emergency. Federal documents show that 672 to 1,809 oil trains each carrying approximately 642 barrels of crude oil would leave the Uinta Basin each year. These trains would increase the risk of fires and oil spills along the route through Colorado, including the vulnerable Colorado River corridor. The western slope of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado would likely experience increased ozone pollution resulting from increased fossil fuel production drifting into Colorado from the neighboring Uinta Basin.

The harm from this proposed railway will exacerbate the climate emergency, increase the risk of wildfires and oil spills, put pressure on our already strained rail system and increase pollution while undermining President Biden’s goals to address the climate crisis.

We therefore, respectfully request that you protect the public interest by instructing the Forest Service to reject the proposed right-of-way through the Ashley National Forest.

Sincerely,

Randi Spivak	Center for Biological Diversity
Micah Parkin	350 Colorado
Patricia Hine	350 Eugene
Sherry Pollack	350 Hawaii

Selden Prentice	350 Seattle
Daniel Villa	350 Tacoma
Honorable Jackie Biskupski	35th Mayor of Salt Lake City
Karen Bueno	Accelerate Neighborhood Climate Action
Maayan Cohen	Action for the Climate Emergency (ACE)
Steve Holmer	American Bird Conservancy
Michael Fiebig	American Rivers
Kestrel Kunz	American Whitewater
Sarah Stewart	Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc
Bob Hamel	Arkansas River Outfitter Association
Billy Marquis	Arkansas River Tours
Heather Cantino	Athens County's Future Action Network, acfan.org
Marie Venner	Businesses for a Livable Climate
Marie Venner	Call to Action Colorado
Mark Meeks	Capitol Heights Presbyterian
Stefanie Klass	Catholic Network US
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Linda Rudolph	Center for Climate Change and Health
John Stansfield	Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition
Sid Madison	Central Jersey Coalition Against Endless War
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Julie Mach	Colorado Mountain Club
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Luke Schaffer	Conservation Colorado
Clayton Dewey	Democratic Socialists of America
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Earth Action, Inc.	Earth Action, Inc.
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Tara Thornton	Endangered Species Coalition
Ellen Montgomery	Environment America

Patrick Kelly-Fischer	Environmental Action
Joan M. Gregory	Environmental Ministry, First Unitarian Church of SLC
Thomas Wheeler	Environmental Protection Information Center
Leah Redwood	Extinction Rebellion San Francisco Bay Area
Ronald J. Martin, Ph.D.	Fresnans against Fracking
Michael Kunkel	Friends of Browns Canyon
Jim Miller	Friends of the Bitterroot
Debbie Bruell	Garfield County Democratic Party
Shelley Silbert	Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Bradley Angel	Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice
Alex Veilleux	HEAL Utah
Matt Reed	High Country Conservation Advocates
Matt Holloway	Holloway Educational Resources
Cheryl Barnds	Honor The Earth
Rachael Lehman	I-70 Citizens Advisory Group
Philip Beck	Indivisible Ambassadors
Elizabetha Stacishin	Indivisible Colorado
Jennifer Mamola	John Muir Project
Marie Claire Egbert	John Muir Project of Earth Island Institute
Debbie Thornburg James	Mayfair Park Neighborhood Association Board
Amy Petré Hill	Mental Health & Inclusion Ministries
Nic Venner	Metro State University, Our Children's Trust <i>Juliana</i> case
Emmett Hobley	Montbello Neighborhood Improvement Association
Marc Coles-Ritchie	Mormon Environmental Stewardship Alliance
Rene Voss	Natural Resources Law
Oscar Simpson	New Mexico Sportsmen
Margaret Rossoff	No Coal in Oakland
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Kristi Douglas	North Range Concerned Citizens
Judy Lord	Peaceful Uprising
Cheryl Barnds	RapidShift Network
Oscar Simpson	Rio Grande Indivisible, NM
Roz McClellan	Rocky Mountain Recreation Initiative
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Zack Porter	Standing Trees
Jean Tepperman	Sunflower Alliance
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Tim Duda	Terra Advocati
Harmony Cummings	The Green House Connection Center
Ruth E. Kastner	The Quantum Institute
Fran Aguirre & Deb James	Unite North Metro Denver
Tony Frates	Utah Native Plant Society
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Paddy McClelland	Wall of Women
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Susan Jane Brown	Western Environmental Law Center
Joro Walker	Western Resource Advocates
Chris Calwell	Western Slope Businesses for a Livable Climate
John Sztukowski	Wild Connections
Jeremy Nichols	WildEarth Guardians
Juli Slivka	Wilderness Workshop
Katherine Quaid	Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN)
Renée M. Chacon	Womxn from the Mountain

Cc:

Senator John Hickenlooper

Senator Michael Bennet

Representative Joe Neguse

Representative Diana DeGette

Sean Babbington, USDA Senior Climate Advisor

Meryl Harrell, Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Gina McCarthy,

David Hayes, Special Assistant to the President for Climate Policy

Gina McCarthy, White House National Climate Advisor

Tracy Stone-Manning, Director, Bureau of Land Management