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Friday, January 15, 2016

Subject: Defend the Colorado Roadless Rule; reject the coal mining loophole for Arch Coal to protect our public lands and our climate and keep Colorado's coal in the ground

Dear U.S. Forest Service,

I strongly oppose the Forest Service proposal to reopen the coal mining loophole in the Colorado Roadless Rule that would allow some of our most pristine national forest to be turned into an energy sacrifice zone. Please withdraw the proposal that would allow Arch Coal to mine coal in Colorado's North Fork Valley

"It is horrifying that we have to fight our own government to save the environment."

-- Ansel Adams

Re-opening the loophole will benefit one company--Arch Coal--at the expense of our air, water, wildlife, and climate while paving the way for mining more than 170 million tons of dirty coal. This could add up to 486 million tons of carbon pollution into the atmosphere and cause as much as \$13 billion in damage to the world's economy and environment, according to your own analysis. The existing mine already releases millions of cubic feet of methane--which is 86 times more damaging to our climate than carbon dioxide over a 20 year period--directly into our atmosphere every day. Expanding the mine and building new methane well pads would only exacerbate the damage at a time when we can least afford it. The climate costs of this proposal are simply too high.

"Our duty to the whole, including to the unborn generations, bids us to restrain an unprincipled present-day minority from wasting the heritage of these unborn generations. The movement for the conservation of wildlife and the larger movement for the conservation of all our natural resources are essentially democratic in spirit, purpose and method."

-- Theodore Roosevelt

This plan is dangerously out of step with the critical goal of cutting U.S. carbon emissions by 26 percent in ten years as well as the president's goal of reducing emissions from federal agencies by 40 percent in the same time period. Today, the threat of climate change to our natural environment and our economy has never been clearer. President Obama and climate scientists agree that if we want to halt the worst potential damage from climate change, we must keep some of the world's known fossil fuel reserves in the ground. And the clean energy solutions we need to power our lives without destroying our planet are getting more affordable and accessible by the day. The Forest Service should draw the line here, where mining coal will spew huge amounts of methane and destroy wild forest.

"As we peer into society's future, we--you and I, and our government--must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering for our own ease and convenience the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow."

-- Dwight D. Eisenhower

The loophole will also set the stage for bulldozing up to 72 miles of road on 30 square miles of roadless forest, degrading habitat for black bear, elk, goshawk, lynx and cutthroat trout. Valued recreation and hunting areas used by the public will be scarred for years. Colorado mountain communities deserve a future supported by sustainable industries, not polluters damaging our climate and a business even fossil fuel companies recognize as declining quickly. Americans across the nation deserve a future where we can thrive and raise our families without the threat of devastating climate change.

"The purpose of conservation: The greatest good to the greatest number of people for the longest time."  
-- Gifford Pinchot, first director of the U.S. Forest Service

The mission of the U.S. Forest Service is to "sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations." Nowhere in that mission does it say the U.S. Forest Service is responsible to protect the profits of coal companies at the expense of national forests that belong to the American people. To fulfill your mission, the only place for dirty sources of energy like coal is in the ground. President Obama himself, in accord with climate scientists, stated that to avoid the worst consequences of climate disruption, some fossil fuels must be kept in the ground. The best place to start doing so is on the lands and waters that belong to the American people. Let's keep coal in the ground and carbon pollution out of our atmosphere.

"Every man who appreciates the majesty and beauty of the wilderness and of wild life, should strike hands with the farsighted men who wish to preserve our material resources, in the effort to keep our forests and our game beasts, game-birds, and game-fish--indeed, all the living creatures of prairie and woodland and seashore--from wanton destruction. Above all, we should realize that the effort toward this end is essentially a democratic movement."  
-- Theodore Roosevelt

Letting Arch Coal expand what is already one of the dirtiest coal mines in our nation at the expense of thousands of acres of roadless forest and a safe climate future is unconscionable. For the sake of Americans today and future generations around the world, I urge you to preserve the Colorado Roadless Rule and close the Arch Coal loophole in order to protect our climate and this beautiful roadless forest.

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."  
-- Aldo Leopold

Thank you for your consideration of my comments. Please do NOT add my name to your mailing list. I will learn about future developments on this issue from other sources.

Sincerely,  
Christopher Lish  
San Rafael, CA