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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 March 5, 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                      |

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|----------------------------|--|
| 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                              |
| Randi Spivak               | Center for Biological Diversity                  |
| Linda Rudolph              | Center for Climate Change and Health             |
| John Stansfield            | Central Colorado Wilderness Coalition            |
| Sid Madison                | Central Jersey Coalition Against Endless War     |
| Natasha Leger              | Citizens for a Healthy Community                 |
| Jim Smith                  | CO Businesses for a Livable Climate              |
| Karen Dils                 | Collegiate Peaks Chapter Trout Unlimited         |
| Julie Mach                 | Colorado Mountain Club                           |
| Scott Denning              | Colorado State University                        |
| Fred Kirsch                | Community for Sustainable Energy                 |
| Luke Schaffer              | Conservation Colorado                            |
| Clayton Dewey              | Democratic Socialists of America                 |
| Michael Browning           | Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance                 |
| Earth Action, Inc.         | Earth Action, Inc.                               |
| Jane Pargiter              | EcoFlight  |
| Kathy Albury               | Elders Rising for Intergenerational Justice      |
| Tara Thornton              | Endangered Species Coalition                     |
| Ellen Montgomery           | Environment America                              |

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| 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   |
| Jerry Rivers            | North American Climate, Conservation and Environment             |
| 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                             |
| Alison Gallensky        | Rocky Mountain Wild  |

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| Christine Canaly         | San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council                |
| Jeff Hart                | Save EPA   |
| Dick Cumiskey            | Sevier Citizens for Clean Air & Water            |
| Rebekah Ashley           | Sierra Club Utah Chapter                         |
| Marie Venner             | Small Business Alliance                          |
| Nathan Taft              | Stand.earth                                      |
| Zack Porter              | Standing Trees                                   |
| Jean Tepperman           | Sunflower Alliance                               |
| Maura Stephens           | System Change Not Climate Change                 |
| 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                        |
| Jonny Vasic              | Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment        |
| Raphael Cordray          | Utah Tar Sands Resistance                        |
| Paddy McClelland         | Wall of Women                                    |
| Daniel E. Estrin         | Waterkeeper Alliance                             |
| 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

Randy Moore, Chief, US Forest Service

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