Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the CO December 2020 lease sale. I write today to urge the BLM to withdraw the leases (encompassing 12,000 acres) in Jackson County or at a minimum put a moratorium on lease sales in this region until the rule-making for SB-181 is complete.

I will focus my comments on the region I know best Grand and Jackson Counties. I moved to North Park in 1993 and lived on a remote ranch in Spicer. I experienced clear skies; pristine streams and lakes; pronghorn, mule deer, elk and moose; a stable economy founded on agriculture, hunting and fishing and other forms of recreation; and a hard-working community whose members cherished and stewarded their natural resources. For example, I knew a long-time logger who used only non-motorized tools and horses to harvest and move timber.

In the ensuing 27 years, I have seen the landscape of North Park traversed by dirt roads forming a web of routes that fragment the habitat and lead to drill pads strewn across the park. The proposed leases are located within wildlife winter habitat and wildlife corridors. If you know anything about the severity of North Park winters, you would understand that these winter habitats are critical to the survival of deer, elk and pronghorn. In 2019 alone, over 43,000 acres in Jackson County were leased to oil and gas corporations. These parcels are located too close to homes, ranch lands, the Never Summer and Zirkel Wilderness Areas and the Arapahoe Wildlife Refuge.

It’s worth mentioning that, at the September meeting of Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission just last week, commissioners agreed that oil and gas production across Colorado is contributing to the decline in our elk and deer herds. North Park reflects these trends. Furthermore, flaring pollutes the air; leaking wells and pipes contaminate the surface water and irrigation ditches; increased truck traffic contributes to poor air quality and the community is fraught with a boom and bust economy that is not sustainable.

I also lived in Grand County in the mid-90s and worked in Grand Lake – the gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park and the Never Summer Mountains. I treasured the natural wonders and expansive scenery. Now I hear that due to extraction east of RMNP, its air quality doesn’t meet some of the standards in the Clean Air Act. Therefore it is imperative that further oil and gas development in the larger region be halted to avert further deleterious impacts to our wilderness areas, the wildlife refuge, and RMNP.

Tankers sit loaded in harbors unable to pump their fossil fuels ashore because the refinery storage has reached capacity due to a decreased demand for oil and gas. So why do we continue to extract, damage our ecosystems and negatively impact human health for a product that is currently in surplus?

I urge you to withdraw the leases in Jackson County or at a minimum place a moratorium on further lease sales in the county until all the cumulative impacts of such extraction on human and environmental health are thoroughly analyzed and the rule-making for SB-181 is complete. I appreciate your consideration of my comments.