



Forest Service says no to drilling in Ruby Mountains

Jennifer Yachnin, E&E News reporter
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The Forest Service today rejected plans to allow new oil and gas exploration in the Ruby Mountains in northern Nevada, citing a combination of “unfavorable geologic conditions” and public pushback against extraction in the area.

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Supervisor Bill Dunkelberger announced that he endorsed the “no leasing alternative” on nearly 53,000 acres of land following the agency’s analysis and environmental assessment.

“Receiving so many comments shows how engaged the public is with this project,” Dunkelberger said in a statement, pointing to the more than 14,000 comments. “Their involvement is critical in getting a firm understanding of what concerns our communities have, what they value, and how our work and decisions can best serve their needs.”

The Forest Service announcement noted that the area under review is popular for camping, hunting, fishing and motorized recreation. The area is also home to the state’s largest mule deer herd.

But the agency’s analysis of the region — which began in 2017 at the behest of the Bureau of Land Management, which manages

adjacent land where wells would be located — also “revealed unfavorable geologic conditions in the area, meaning that there is little to no potential of oil and gas resources in the area.”

The Forest Service will accept objections to its recommendation for 45 days.

Environmentalists who had opposed potential oil and gas drilling in the region praised the Forest Service announcement (Greenwire , Aug. 3, 2018).

“This is a resounding victory for the Rubies and the wildlife that call them home,” said Center for Biological Diversity Nevada State Director Patrick Donnelly. “It’s a testament to the power of the people to resist the Trump administration’s destructive frack-anywhere agenda.”

But Donnelly said he would still like to see Congress adopt legislation sponsored by Nevada Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D) to permanently protect the region from development.

Cortez Masto sponsored the “Ruby Mountains Protection Act” earlier this year, which would prohibit drilling in a 450,000-acre zone (E&E Daily, Jan. 31).