

COLORADO NEWS

Mining, drilling blocked on nearly 222K acres of Colorado public lands

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A sunny Autumn afternoon in Crystal River Valley. Marble, Colorado. (Getty Images)

Biden administration blocks mineral, energy development on Thompson Divide for 2 decades

DENVER (KDVR) — Mining and drilling is now blocked on nearly 222,000 acres of public lands on Colorado's Thompson Divide, a move the Biden-Harris administration said is part of its goal to conserve and restore land across the country.

A Wednesday order signed by Interior Secretary Deb Haaland withdraws the federal land in central Colorado from future mining and energy development for the next 20 years, according to [a release from the Interior Department](#).

“Today’s action has been the goal of a decades-long grassroots effort from a diverse stakeholder group, including hunters, anglers, ranchers, conservation groups, and local governments — and reflects this Administration’s ongoing commitment to honoring and lifting up locally led conservation efforts,” Haaland said in the release.

President Joe Biden [promised to protect the Thompson Divide](#) from mineral development when he [designated Camp Hale as a national monument](#) in late 2022. The [administration called the divide](#) “one of the state’s most cherished landscapes, known for its ranching heritage and grazing lands, important wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities and clean water.”

Some local officials applauded the move, including the chair of the Pitkin County commissioners, Greg Poschman, who said in a statement that the area’s constituents sought protections for the divide for more than a decade.

Carbondale Mayor Ben Bohmfalk said in a statement that fossil fuel development in the Thompson Divide is “a use that is not compatible with the livelihoods of those that rely on this landscape today.”



A sunny Autumn afternoon in Crystal River Valley. Marble, Colorado.

Thompson Divide mining blocked on public lands in Colorado

The order protects some 221,898 acres of U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management land. Here is a breakdown of what land is included:

- 197,745 acres of the White River and Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison national forests
- 15,465 acres of BLM-managed public lands
- 8,689 acres of reserved federal mineral interest under non-federal land

According to the Interior Department, oil and gas leasing has been unavailable for “several years” in much of the Thompson Divide, and there is no oil exploration or production planned for the area. The order also does not affect water rights, private land activity or valid existing rights.

The 20-year limit on the action is because of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, which only allows the interior secretary to withdraw more than 5,000 acres of land for up to two decades. For permanent withdrawal, Congress would have to write it into law.

This move is part of the administration’s so-called America the Beautiful initiative. It sets a 2030 deadline to conserve and restore at least 30% of U.S. lands and waters.

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