

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The companies and organizations below, which represent the interests of thousands of anglers and the angling industry, extend our congratulations on your confirmation as Interior secretary. We commend your expressed interest in balanced public-lands energy development and welcome the opportunity to work with you to sustain the habitat needs of fish and wildlife, particularly as they affect American sportsmen and our nation's irreplaceable fisheries.

Sportsmen are concerned that fast-paced resource development may result in the loss of values associated with public lands and the fish and wildlife populations that rely on these lands. On Feb. 12, 2009, the Colorado Bureau of Land Management will open approximately 80,000 acres of federal public lands to oil and gas drilling. More than 57,000 of these acres are located within designated habitat of Colorado River cutthroat trout, a species native to Colorado and prized by anglers from across the country and whose long-term survival could be jeopardized by energy development in these areas as currently proposed.

Colorado River cutthroats initially were petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act in December 1999. In 2004 and 2007, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a "not warranted" decision regarding the species' threatened or endangered status. During the same time, however, the U.S. Forest Service designated the Colorado River cutthroat a sensitive species (in Regions 2 and 4), the BLM accorded it a similar status, and Colorado, Utah and Wyoming have developed special guidelines for its management. In 2006, the Conservation Agreement for Colorado River Cutthroat Trout was signed by entities including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service and the BLM and pledged to "expedite implementation of conservation measures for Colorado River cutthroat trout ... as a collaborative and cooperative effort among resource agencies."

The focus of the conservation agreement is not only to protect remaining populations of Colorado River cutthroat trout but also to facilitate the restoration and expansion of populations into suitable habitat that currently is unoccupied. Permitting energy projects in Colorado River cutthroat habitat countermands the effective management and long-term sustainability of this subspecies as specified in the agreement. Furthermore, a threatened or endangered listing for the trout would give rise to an entirely new set of problems, particularly to anglers and the recreational angling industry.

We believe that energy development within the intact, high-quality watersheds that support Colorado River cutthroat trout populations could degrade key habitat and result

in the species' further decline. Beyond protecting existing populations, however, opportunities must be preserved for restoration and expansion of Colorado River cutthroat trout populations into suitable drainages. While we agree that our natural resources can be developed responsibly and consistent with the multiple-use mandate outlined in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, we maintain that certain habitats and species should be afforded greater protections to avoid unnecessary losses as well as listings under the Endangered Species Act. We urge you to consider future conservation of Colorado River cutthroat populations and the protection of habitat with restoration potential, both in the BLM energy leases proposed in Colorado and in the context of the federal leasing process as a whole.

The government's overall approach to oil and gas leasing on federal public lands poses a threat to our nation's game species and sporting traditions that we have a vested interest in resolving. The streams and rivers that flow across federal public lands shelter Western trout, salmon and steelhead and attract recreational anglers from across the country. The loss of any fishery is reflected not only in dwindling angler numbers and fewer fish; it also negatively affects communities that thrive on angler dollars, an industry that provides thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in excise taxes to fund sustainable fisheries management, and the monies received by state game agencies through licenses and fees.

Sportsmen trust that you will take advantage of the upcoming BLM lease sale in Colorado to review the current mineral leasing paradigm and implement necessary changes in policy, protocol and management. We thank you again for giving this critical matter your prompt attention and offer our support in surmounting the challenges to come.

Sincerely,

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, *Steve Belinda, energy policy manager*
American Fly Fishing Trade Association, *Gary Berlin, president*
American Sportfishing Association, *Gordon Robertson, vice president*
Federation of Fly Fishers, *Leah Elwell, conservation coordinator*
Scott Fly Rod Co., *Jim Bartschi, president*
Colorado Trout Unlimited, *David Nickum, executive director*
Western Native Trout Initiative, *Robin Knox, coordinator*