

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 23, 2023

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland:

We are writing to request that the Department of the Interior initiate and complete the process to implement a 20-year administrative withdrawal from operation under the Mineral Leasing law for federal land described in our bill, S. 706, the Ruby Mountains Protection Act, which includes approximately 309,272 acres in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, and 39,926 acres in the Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Please see the attached maps of the region outlining the areas pertaining to this request.

Nevada is home to many special landscapes and one of the most unique is the Ruby Mountains in Northern Nevada, often referred to as “Nevada’s Swiss Alps.” These lands are the ancestral homeland of the Te-Moak Tribe of the Western Shoshone Indians of Nevada and are beloved by hunters, anglers, birdwatchers, and other recreationists who travel from across the state and beyond to enjoy the area. Additionally, the Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge, commonly referenced as “the Ruby Marshes,” includes a wetland oasis in one of the West’s driest states, providing a vital stopover for migratory waterfowl in the Pacific Flyway and fisheries that include trout and largemouth bass. As such, the Ruby Mountains, the Ruby Marshes, and their surrounding environment are treasured by all Nevadans for its scenic landscapes, high recreational value, and numerous wildlife.

Although the area encompassed in this request is largely classified as having no or low potential for oil and gas, expressions of interest for energy leasing have often been filed in the region. In response to this threat, there is widespread support for protecting this landscape, including support from the Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone Indians of Nevada, national and regional conservation organizations, and a coalition of several national and local sporting groups. In 2019, the U.S. Forest Service determined that no leasing should occur within the corresponding areas under their jurisdiction due to the minimal amount of oil and gas resources in the area and the potential impacts to the environment and the natural landscape.

Formally withdrawing these lands from mineral leasing, thereby prohibiting oil and gas development in the Ruby Mountains and the Ruby Marshes, will not only preserve these great public spaces and scenic landscapes enjoyed by thousands of Nevadans and visitors each year, but it also preserves the recreational opportunities, outdoor economy, rare wildlife and plant life, as well as the local culture that these beloved mountains and neighboring spaces support.

It is imperative that the Ruby Mountains and the Ruby Marshes receive a higher level of protection to further safeguard these remarkable public spaces from development, and we strongly urge you to expedite the withdrawal of these areas from oil and gas leasing.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We are proud to carry the voice of Nevadans and the Te-Moak Tribe forward so special places like the Ruby Mountains and adjacent areas can be enjoyed by generations to come.

Sincerely,



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
U.S. Senator

Cc:

Martha Williams, Director, United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Tracy Stone-Manning, Director, Bureau of Land Management

Cynthia Martinez, Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System

Randy Moore, Chief of the United States Forest Service

Matt Lee-Ashley, Chief of Staff at the White House Council on Environmental Quality