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Colorado Trout Unlimited



March 28, 2022

The Honorable Michael Bennet
The Honorable John Hickenlooper
The Honorable Joe Neguse
Via email

Dear Senators Bennet and Hickenlooper and Congressman Neguse,

We are writing to urge you to oppose a plan to build a rail line that will result in [up to 10 two-mile-long trains](#) of heated rail cars filled with waxy crude traveling along the Colorado River and through some of Colorado's most vulnerable landscapes.

The proposed Uinta Basin Railway would connect oil fields in Utah to the national rail network, specifically the Central Line adjacent to the Colorado River through Grand Junction, Glenwood Springs, Eagle, and other small towns, along the Colorado and Fraser Rivers and through Denver before heading south and east to refineries in Oklahoma and the Gulf Coast.

The project has sparked [opposition from more than 70 counties, municipalities, and sanitation districts](#) and dozens of environmental groups. Concerns are many. Eagle County and a number of environmental groups have filed a lawsuit to stop the project, citing the need for further environmental assessment, and the local elected officials have opposed the project, voicing concerns that a derailment could devastate local tourism. Others say the project will more than quadruple the production of the Uinta Basin oil fields – an increase of more than 350,000 barrels per day – and cause more than 53 million tons of additional carbon pollution per year. And there are concerns that increased traffic through the Moffat Tunnel [would prompt a reopening of the Tennessee Pass rail line](#).

As an organization that works to protect cold-water fisheries and ecosystems, Colorado Trout Unlimited is focused on the environmental devastation that will occur when there is a derailment (and it is a question of when, not if, as the Environmental Impact Statement estimates there will be an average of 0.89 accidents per year involving a loaded train and another 0.89 accidents involving unloaded trains [Table 3.2.2](#)). Waxy crude is solid at room temperature and each of the railcars on these two-mile-long trains is heated to around 110 degrees to keep the substance liquid.

Tens of millions of people depend on the Colorado River – one of the most important rivers in the West – for drinking water, tourism and irrigation. As they move through Colorado, these heated oil tankers will travel along the river – through the center of Glenwood Springs and on through Glenwood Canyon, Eagle County, through Gore Canyon and Grand County along the headwaters of the Colorado river, then along the Fraser River through Winter Park and the Moffat Tunnel. East of the tunnel the train will rumble through 33 tunnels and navigate horseshoe curves as it makes its way to Denver and beyond.

Picture up to 10 two-mile-long trains with heated rail cars filled with crude oil that hardens to the consistency of candle wax when exposed to air traveling along two of the most threatened rivers

Trout Unlimited: America's Leading Coldwater Fisheries Conservation Organization

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in the country, the Colorado and Fraser. Picture what the Colorado River would look like if even one of the tanker cars split open and spilled its load of 29,400 gallons of waxy crude, which solidifies as it flows into the river. The devastation to the river ecosystem would be catastrophic. What happens if one of these [tankers derails in Denver?](#)

Picture oil tankers heated to 110 degrees derailing in tinder-dry forests on the West Slope or the bone-dry grasslands of the Front Range. In an era where more and bigger fires are predicted, it's easy to see another Troublesome Fire on the West Slope or another out-of-control grass fire on the Front Range [sparked by one of these heated tankers.](#)

Colorado Trout Unlimited does not oppose all oil and gas development and indeed has worked with your Oil and Gas Commission and other stakeholders on rulemakings to manage such development responsibly. This project, however, poses unacceptable levels of risk – and the impacts to Colorado specifically have largely been ignored in the federal permitting processes to date.

We ask that you to do everything you can to stop the Uinta Basin Railway project. We are happy to meet with you and/or your staff to discuss options. In the meantime, please ensure no federal money is used for the project.

Sincerely,



Matt Moskal
President



David Nickum
Executive Director



Barbara Sheedlo
Bull Moose Committee Chair