

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you for this opportunity to speak today. My name is Alex Johnson. And I am Executive Director of the Western Slope Conservation Center. I speak representing the 450 members of the Conservation Center, as well as a resident of Delta County. We, in the North Fork Valley, boast an incredible agricultural community, with ranches, orchards, wineries, and small-scale organic farms. We host the highest elevation [indiscernible] cultural area of North America and the greatest density of organic farms in the State. We have vibrant communities with their own identities and personalities. It is my home, and I love it. So, much so, that I recently bought a house that I hope to live in with my family for the rest of my life. It's incredibly beautiful looking out my backdoor. And it also happens to be looking out towards three of the largest coal mines in Colorado. The coalmines have invested in our communities. They have supported generations of families who built the homes and streets and irrigation canals that have made our Valley so productive. For more than a century, coal and agricultural -- agriculture have gone hand-in-hand. Farmers mined coal. And coal miners farmed. Together, the Western Slope Conservation Center, local coal mines, and community residents formed good neighbor partnerships that not only mitigated impacts, but directly supported conservation of the North Fork Valley. Offering just one example, over the last 15 years, the West Elk Mine and the Western Slope Conservation Center have worked together to put over 11,000 acres of private land into conservation easements, conserving our agricultural heritage forever. But, this is a difficult and historic moment for our Valley. In the last two years, the local coal mines have laid off nearly 900 well-paid employees. Two of the coal mines have shut down indefinitely, with Oxbow having just demolished its rail silo this past month. The reality of our community is that we are now looking into an unknown and scary future. What is certain is that the future will not look like the past. During this full programmatic review, I encourage the BLM, OSM, and DOI to look carefully at how leases are valued, how environmental impacts are analyzed, and how royalties are determined. The Federal Government must safeguard the many natural resources, which coal communities will rely upon for generations to come. These are the resources that the North Fork Valley has conserved thanks to conscientious local mines

and an engaged citizenry. I request that the Department of Interior should do everything in its power to support local coal miners, their families, and the communities in which they live. Laid off coal miners should be given adequate resources for retraining, so that they can stay in the communities which they have called home for generations. Coal communities also need Federal support to hasten new businesses and job. Our communities will thrive only with a balanced approach that safeguards our air, land, and water, supporting a diversified economic and energy future. Thank you.