

REV. ELIAS KOCOS: Good morning. My name is Father Elias Kocos. I'm a priest with the Greek Orthodox Christian Church. I will speak to our common obligation and love for all people and lands and to your consideration on policies as managers of these public lands and all people. As stewards of God's creation and all that he has given us, we have the moral and ethical responsibility to him as owner to treat all that he has given us with care and respect. This is the responsibility of all humanity as God's co-creator, endowed with freewill to embrace our role and to preserve the earth as a gift and resource offered to human by our loving creator. This planet is a life-giving organism which is more than plentiful for those who know and practice moderation, and our life is grounded in the fundamental and closely intertwined relationships with God, with our neighbor, and with the earth itself. The earth and humanity are created and intended to exist in a relationship of respect and harmony and through this decision-making process today, we have the opportunity to all stand together in solidarity, determination, and decision making to steer our world toward a more caring world view and a more compassionate humanity. Public lands which belong to us all are a collective responsibility and the destructive coal mining practices that are endangering our community's clean air and public health, and the things we love most about our state, these majestic public lands, require us to reform this current broken system. We want our families to be healthy for those who want to work to have access to jobs with dignity and for God's creation to thrive. Our current systems for coal stewardship on public lands can be dramatically improved. When considering a coal lease we must not jeopardize our community's health nor the health of God's creation. We are stewards, not owners of God's creation. We are responsible for ensuring the gifts of God's creation rightly shared with all people and all species today as well as with future generations. The risk is common to us all of us regardless of our ecclesiastical or confessional identities. We must protect the world and not prey on it and discover the worth of each thing. To be filled with awe and contemplation and recognition that we are profoundly united with every creature and all God's creation. As coal declines, we must ensure that coal workers and communities are protected and supported with sustainable economic opportunities. This review presents an immediate opportunity for our nation to take strong action to ensure a just transition as we reform the existing coal leasing program. This is a morality issue and our first responsibility is to care

for the earth that God created and the well-being of citizens. As a saying in the orthodox church has said, the laws of nature are neither dissolved nor disturbed but always remain constant. We are today obligated to focus our attention on human interventions impacting the ecological balance to guarantee the earth's sustainability. Thank you for allowing me to speak. May we acknowledge our accountability, reverence, and responsibility to God. Thank you.