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I am a resident of Moab, Utah, and Greater Canyonlands is my backyard. I am also a registered dietician who has worked in the health care field for more than 30 years.

As a Moabite, I deeply value Greater Canyonlands because of its local health benefits. As a public health professional, I value Greater Canyonlands because it helps protect clean water and air for millions of people who live down stream and down wind, and because it provides the kind of vast expanse of wild unspoiled country we need for physical and mental health.

I moved to Moab because I love to mountain bike and to hike; it is how I stay fit, healthy and happy. And Greater Canyonlands provides some of the best biking and hiking trails in the world.

Clean air and water were also big draws for moving to Moab. When we moved here, we happily called the bright blue skies "Moab Blue," a perfect complement to the gorgeous red rock canyon country of Greater Canyonlands.



I am worried now though because a recent explosion of oil and gas drilling in the area is threatening to change all this. A dozen new wells have been drilled along the northern edge of Greater Canyonlands. Gas is currently being flared into the open air. Whenever the wind blows, roiling clouds of dust rise from the sprawling network of roads and well pads dirty the air. Recently, a leak at a drilling site sent oil down a side canyon into the Green River, a major tributary to the Colorado.

In the past I lived in Wyoming and watched many communities lose their clean air and water due to oil and gas development, despite promises made to the contrary. Extractive industries have a long history of polluting the air and water of surrounding communities. My experience says not to trust the "good will" of corporations that will see vast profits even if it is at the expense of a local community and a nationally treasured landscape.

Already "Moab blue" days have drastically decreased. Now, we are also facing potential water contamination from extractive energy production. There are unanswered questions about whether the consumption of water for oil and gas development could diminish our aquifers. Huge industrial scale trucks now roar down the scenic highways in Greater Canyonlands and through our community, spewing exhaust and making "share the road" unpalatable for people biking or walking.

We need to protect Greater Canyonlands for the sake of the air, water and social climate of the Moab area, the millions of people who rely on the water and air that flows through it, and the untold numbers of visitors who seek out this amazing place for physical and emotional rejuvenation. It would be an immeasurable tragedy if the irreplaceable health benefits of Greater Canyonlands were sacrificed for the profit line of a few corporations or a limited number of short-term jobs.