Good morning Commissioners.

I’m here to speak to the resolution regarding oil and gas leasing on public lands in San Juan County.

Our County is a special place in many ways. One is that it is the most archaeologically rich county in the United States. This archaeology isn’t just American history. As you know, these are sacred sites to indigenous peoples whose ancestors left their footprints in our backyard.

Here is a letter from the Hopi Tribe. And this is a letter from the All Pueblo Council of Governors, representing 20 Pueblo tribes.

These 21 tribes have challenged the government’s recent “fire sale” of leasing in eastern and southern San Juan County, which has attempted to lease off all of the culturally rich areas of our county that are not in Bears Ears.

Despite requests from the Tribes and Friends of Cedar Mesa, the BLM has refused to remove even a single sacred site, even a single acre from these lease sales.

As such, the message this proposed resolution sends...in its current form...is that oil and gas money is more important than Native American culture and heritage.

In your last meeting, the BLM told you that you should just trust the Federal Government to protect these sacred sites.

But any archaeologist who has worked in this area can show you many examples of how development has negatively impacted cultural sites. I’ve seen it for myself.

The BLM’s own research shows that new roads for oil & gas development increase looting and grave robbing of Native American sites.

Even if you believe the government will require drillers to technically avoid sites, are they really protected if a pump jack, an oil tank, or a pipeline is just a few feet away?

If someone drilled an oil well just 100 yards from San Juan Hill, Window Rock, or the Washington Memorial, do you think people would consider that those sacred sites had been “protected”?

And what about Bluff and White Mesa? The BLM wants to approve drilling in Bluff’s water shed, right through the aquifer that provides our drinking water. Other leases are just on the border of the White Mesa Reservation.

There’s a better way than unplanned, unrestricted leasing.
Instead of passing this resolution, please ask the BLM to stop leasing in eastern and southern San Juan County until there can be a real planning process to consider the cultural landscape and community impacts. That’s what the BLM was doing before the Trump administration killed smart planning.

It was called a Master Leasing Plan, which would identify areas that are too culturally sensitive to drill and also GIVE oil companies certainty of expedited development.

That creates a WIN-WIN. It facilitates responsible oil & gas, it prevents litigation, AND protects sacred sites.

Please vote NO on this resolution and ask the BLM to resume smart planning for responsible energy development.