

MATTHEW H. MEAD
GOVERNOR



2323 Carey Avenue
CHEYENNE, WY 82002

Office of the Governor

May 30, 2018

Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re: Rock Springs BLM Field Office, 2018 fourth quarter oil and gas lease sale in the Greater Little Mountain Area

Dear Secretary Zinke,

The Rock Springs Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has received nominations of parcels for the 2018 fourth quarter oil and gas lease sale within the Greater Little Mountain Area and the Red Desert to Hoback Mule Deer Corridor. I bring to your attention the work that has occurred in this area while you consider whether to defer some of the leases.

The Greater Little Mountain Coalition was formed to promote a balanced management plan that protects the area's hunting, fishing, and recreational opportunities for future generations while supporting responsible energy development. Recognizing the need to amend the Rock Springs Resource Management Plan, former Wyoming Governor Freudenthal and BLM State Director Don Simpson agreed in 2009 to defer leasing certain parcels in the Greater Little Mountain Area until the amendment was finalized. Since then all parties have worked with the understanding that this agreement would control leasing in the area until the amendment was completed. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department has worked with local County Commissioners, the Coalition, and several groups representing diverse interests to develop a management proposal for consideration in the BLM's Rock Springs Resource Management Plan amendment process. The BLM's amendment process was started in 2011 and local interests remain engaged.

Earlier this year, the BLM issued guidance updating its oil and gas leasing process that allows for leasing to occur during the timeframe in which a Resource Management Plan is being amended. Many of the people involved in the Rock Springs Resource Management Plan amendment process are concerned that this new policy will negatively impact the work they have put into developing a balanced management plan for the area.

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I continue to support following the agreement reached in 2009 that defers leasing the parcels that meet the criteria outlined in former State Director Simpson's letter. However, you may be considering following the Department's new leasing direction instead. I ask that you defer those parcels that lack leasing stipulations designed to protect the resources being addressed by the Rock Springs Resource Management Plan. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department has identified parcels 223, 225 and 231 within the Pine Mountain area as crucial winter range for mule deer, elk and antelope, in addition to being important parturition areas for mule deer and elk. They have also identified parcel 219 as wholly within the migration corridor. I ask that, at a minimum, you defer these parcels.

For those parcels that go to sale, it is important that the leases within Greater sage-grouse core areas are subject to the appropriate stipulations contained in the Rock Springs Resource Management Plan. Additionally, it is important that the parcels within the migration corridor contain the controlled surface use stipulation that aligns with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department's recommendation. Finally, it is important that the timing limit stipulation for big game crucial winter range is included in the appropriate leases.

Thank you for considering these important resource issues. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, or have your staff contact Mike McGrady in my office.

Sincerely,



Matthew H. Mead

Governor

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cc: Brian Steed, Acting BLM Director
Mary Jo Rugwell, Wyoming BLM State Director