



WYOMING MINING ASSOCIATION

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September 28, 2023

The Honorable Tracy Stone-Manning
Director
US Bureau of Land Management
1849 C Street, NW
Room 5646

Washington, DC 20240

Submitted via US Mail and electronically to: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/13853/530>

RE: US Bureau of Land Management Rock Springs Field Office Resource Management Plan Revision

Dear Director Stone-Manning:

The Wyoming Mining Association (WMA) is a statewide trade organization that represents and advocates for 33 mining company members producing bentonite, coal, trona (natural soda ash), uranium, and lignite, as well as companies developing gold and rare earth element deposits. WMA also represents over 100 associate member (service and supply) companies, one electricity co-op, and one advanced nuclear power company.

On August 18, 2023, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) began a 90-day public comment period for the Rock Springs Field Office Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) and associated Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) covering 3.6 million acres of public lands and 3.7 million acres (approximately 5,780 square miles) of Federal mineral estate in portions of Lincoln, Sweetwater, Uinta, Sublette and Fremont counties in southwest Wyoming. The comment period closes November 16, 2023.

WMA represents significant mining interests in southwest Wyoming, including active trona (natural soda ash), coal, and uranium. Future mining in southwest Wyoming may also include rare earth minerals and other critical and strategic minerals. Mining in Wyoming has a significant revenue contribution to the Federal, State, and Local governments. In calendar year 2022, leasable minerals in Sweetwater County alone netted over \$32 million in revenue to the Federal Government and over \$433 million in total for Wyoming (source: Department of Interior, Natural Resource Revenue Data, CY2022). According to the BLM Solid Mineral Occurrence and Development Potential Report for the Rock Springs Field Office Resource Management Plan and Associated Environmental Impact Statement, August 2012, there are significant quantities of leasable, locatable and salable minerals within the RMP area. For example, the Known Sodium Leasing Area covers over 1,100 square miles, of which 357,772 acres (or 559 square miles) is in the Rock Springs RMP. In other words, trona is present in 10% of the RMP analysis area. The WMA and its members are a significant interested party to the RMP.

Congress mandates to the BLM, under 43 CFR, that the BLM will manage the public lands under principles of multiple use and sustained yield. The term multiple use is defined as "the management of the public lands and their various resource values so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people." Alternative B, the agency's preferred alternative, certainly does not meet the mandate of multiple use and sustainable yield. Rather, it appears to be a plan solely based on conservation and will limit the potential for multiple use on BLM

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lands going forward. It is not clear why the BLM has chosen Alternative B as the preferred alternative, and the BLM presents no clear reasoning for this choice.

Chapter 5 of the RMP Draft Planning Criteria of the RMP Scoping Report of January 2012 lists several key planning goals for the RMP, including the following:

- Broad-based public participation will be an integral part of the planning and EIS process
- The RMP will recognize valid and existing rights
- The planning team will work cooperatively and collaboratively with cooperating agencies and all other interested groups, agencies, and individuals.

This RMP update process started on February 1, 2011, and this update process has been underway for over 140 months. The process seems to have completely missed its mark for the planning goals outlined in the January 2012 RMP Scoping Report, lacking broad based participation, recognition of valid and existing rights, and cooperative and collaborative work with cooperating agencies and other interest groups. During that 140 months, the BLM has held minimal public meetings during this entire process. Since that time there has been virtually no communications on the RMP and there has not been detailed alternative information released to the public. Abruptly in August 2023, the alternatives and public comment process were announced. There has been minimal public participation as one three-hour “open house” in 140 months is not broad-based public participation.

BLM should expand its public participation opportunities and present their alternatives more clearly to the public. As presented, the preferred Alternative B does not recognize valid and existing rights. (There are many examples, but as one example, Alternative B proposes to prohibit surface occupancy within one mile of historic raptor nest locations, not just active raptor nest locations; this has the potential to suddenly close many current operations that have valid existing rights to operate where a historic nest may have existed).

BLM should consider valid existing rights throughout the RMP planning document and revise the alternatives appropriately. The planning team has not worked cooperatively with interested groups; as an example, trona occurs on approximately 10% of the RMP area, yet there hasn't been a single cooperative meeting between the BLM and trona operators (or any other mining industry group for that matter). BLM should hold meetings with interested groups and consider their input in drafting the alternatives.

Publication of this RMP seems to be rushed. There was no information and no public participation for years and then suddenly, the RMP and Draft EIS went to public notice. It is interesting timing considering the National Environmental Policy Act, Implementing Regulatory Revisions Phase 2 was published in the Federal Register on July 31, 2023. This RMP and DRAFT EIS should be paused to meet and incorporate those newly proposed NEPA revisions.

The BLM has been developing this RMP for 140 months, and the public and interested parties are now being given 3 months to review and provide comment; this simply is not enough time to review such a large and comprehensive document, particularly since Alternative B is vastly different from the existing RMP. More review time must be provided.

The RMP is flawed at the outset, both substantively and procedurally. Most of the baseline data is at least a decade old. The BLM doesn't even include recent EIS information for mineral development. The RMP completely ignores sage grouse even though the agency is aggressively working to expand sage grouse areas and protections, many of which will directly impact the RMP area. The RMP

explicitly disregards the wild horse management issue. The decision to ignore these matters is inconsistent with NEPA and the BLM planning regulations. The RMP should be paused until these important matters can be included in this RMP.

Given the numerous concerns with the process used to draft and submit the proposed RMP for public comment, WMA respectfully requests the following:

- The BLM should withdraw the draft RMP and expand the opportunities for the public, stakeholders, and cooperating agencies to voice their concerns.
- The BLM should complete its planning for sage grouse and wild horses and incorporate those matters into the RMP and Draft EIS.
- The BLM should take that additional public input and incorporate it into a new recommended alternative that recognizes existing rights AND meets the objective of multiple uses and sustained yield.
- Once the updated draft RMP is published, the BLM should open up a public comment period for at least 180 days. 90 days is simply not enough to digest a document of this magnitude and complexity.

The Wyoming Mining Association appreciates the opportunity to offer the following these initial comments. Thank you for your kind consideration.

Best regards,



Travis Deti
Executive Director