



November 2, 2022

Thomas Bills, Project Manager
BLM Buffalo Field Office
1423 Fort Street
Buffalo, WY 82834

Re: Buffalo RMP Amendment/Supplemental EIS

Dear Mr. Bills,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit scoping comments concerning the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Buffalo Field Office: Notice of Intent to Amend Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Prepare Associated Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Amendment).

The U.S. District Court of Montana ordered the BLM to conduct new coal screening and NEPA analysis that considers no leasing and limited coal leasing alternatives, and disclose the public health impact, both climate and non-climate, of burning fossil fuels from the planning areas for the Buffalo RMP. Wyoming appreciates the BLM's engagement with the State of Wyoming and local governments to complete this task.

In previous Buffalo RMP comments, I stated I do not support a decision that would result in the reduction of the coal leasing boundaries. Coal remains an important part of Wyoming's energy and economic portfolio. Wyoming produces 40 percent of the Nation's coal and 11 percent of the Nation's electricity. Our coal is currently shipped to 26 states, which relates to the employment of approximately 5,000 people in Wyoming. Coal continues to meaningfully contribute to our state and local communities as we actively seek advances in technology and utilization strategies.

The BLM and its cooperators should plan to engage in fair and open discussion to address possibilities as they arise, and take into account markets, regulations, and technology in the analysis. Speculation and public perception alone must not be determining factors. The previous decision made on the Buffalo RMP took into account the BLM's principles of multiple use and sustained yield in a manner that best addresses the purpose and need, and should remain the basis for new analysis.

The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality plans to be a cooperating partner in this effort. Their Land Quality Division noted that the Coal Resource Development Boundary within the Buffalo RMP was recently reduced as a result of the updated RMP. This boundary was put in

place to recognize and protect the coal resource, its value to the nation, and future leasing, to be conducted in the public's interest. Any further reduction in this boundary, or leasing restrictions, would not be in the public interest. These interests include items such as job creation, revenue received from bonus bids and recovered mineral taxes, ensuring a reliable, low cost, base load fuel for electricity generation.

My Office, along with Wyoming's state agencies, look forward to working with the BLM in a meaningful collaborative and cooperative manner. In addition to these comments, attached are scoping comments from the Wyoming Game & Fish Department and Wyoming Department of Agriculture.

Thank you for considering the State of Wyoming as the BLM moves forward in its planning and analysis of the Buffalo RMP Amendment/Supplemental EIS. Please contact Nolan Rap in my office if you have any questions: nolan.rap@wyo.gov or 307-777-7521.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark Gordon", written in a cursive style.

Mark Gordon
Governor

MG:nr:kh



WYOMING GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

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October 10, 2022

WER 11849.00p
Bureau of Land Management
Buffalo Field Office
Notice of Intent to Amend Resource Management Plan and
Prepare Associated Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
Cooperator Agency Invitation
DOI-BLM-WY-P070-2022-0115-RMP-EIS
Campbell, Johnson, and Sheridan County

Tom Bills
Bureau of Land Management
Buffalo Field Office
1425 Fort Street
Buffalo, WY 82834
tbills@blm.gov

Dear Mr. Bills,

The staff of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (Department) has reviewed the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) invitation to participate, as a Cooperating Agency, in the preparation of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and associated Resource Management Plan amendment, to address a new coal screening for the Buffalo Field Office. We would like to be included as a Cooperator during this process. Anika Mahoney, Habitat Protection Biologist, will be the Department's lead point of contact for this project. She will coordinate with applicable Department staff throughout the process.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Anika Mahoney at 307-335-2623.

Sincerely,

Angi Bruce
Deputy Director

Tom Bills
October 10, 2022
Page 2 of 2 – WER 11849.00p

AB/ws/ct

cc: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Will Schultz, Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Chris Wichmann, Wyoming Department of Agriculture



November 1, 2022

Thomas Bills
Project Manager
Bureau of Land Management
Buffalo Field Office
1425 for Street
Buffalo WY 82834
tbills@blm.gov

Dear Mr. Bills,

Following are the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) Scoping comments regarding the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Buffalo Field Office: Notice of Intent to Amend Resource Management Plan and Prepare Associated Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Amendment).

Our comments are specific to our mission: dedication to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources and quality of life. As the proposed project could affect our industry, citizens, and natural resources it is important that you continue to inform us of proposed actions and decisions and continue to provide the opportunity to communicate pertinent issues and concerns.

The WDA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed Amendment. The project area encompasses approximately 780,000 acres of public land and 4.8 million acres of Federal mineral estate. We offer the following comments to consider for inclusion in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis.

Congressional mandates, federal statutes, and regulations call for multiple use, and should be an integral part of the analysis. Moreover, the analysis should evaluate the impact of development on the intent expressed in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 to manage public lands in a manner that will provide "*food and habitat for fish, wildlife, and domestic animals.*" The impacts on food and habitat for fish and wildlife are usually thoroughly addressed in NEPA documents. However, impacts of the project on food and habitat for domestic animals should rise to the same degree of study and documentation.

The WDA urges the BLM to analyze the individual effects upon livestock grazing management in the Amendment: large areas of disturbance and fencing, decreased Animal Unit Months (AUMs), potential ground and surface water quality and quantity impacts, increased off- and on-road traffic, construction of new roads and potential vehicle/equipment conflicts with livestock, decreased palatability of vegetation and forage from road dust and development activities, unsuccessful reclamation that does not return to healthy rangeland conditions, introduction and spread of noxious and invasive weeds and other social and economic impacts to livestock grazing permittees and livestock management operations.

Equal Opportunity in Employment and Services

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The WDA urges the BLM to work closely and consistently with affected livestock grazing permittees and agriculture producers to learn of their concerns and recommendations regarding the development of coal resources on public land and Federal estates. Livestock grazing permittees are intimately familiar with areas potentially affected by mining development and possess long-term, on-the-ground knowledge. Livestock grazing permittees are particularly aware of both individual and cumulative impacts on wildlife, livestock, and rangeland health for the planning area. It is important for BLM staff to continuously inform all livestock grazing permittees directly or indirectly affected of the issues, decisions, and resulting actions regarding development associated with this Amendment.

The WDA supports discussions between the mine operators and livestock permittees to identify strategies (i.e. compensatory mitigation) to help lessen the burden and reduce economic impacts to grazing permittees related to project development. Such strategies may include, but are not limited to: movement of livestock to an open allotment or pasture, monitoring impacts using the Wyoming Rangeland Monitoring Guide, construction of water and range improvements on either public or private land, lease of additional grazing land to replace allotments lost to grazing, and reimbursement to livestock grazing permittees for loss of AUMs and pastures.

The WDA recommends reclamation efforts focus on re-establishing rangeland forage to support both healthy opportunities for livestock grazing and wildlife. The BLM should consider what type of weeds might become established, and the ability to control weeds in a timely manner by developing a weed monitoring and control plan as part of the NEPA analysis. Of particular concern, weeds such as cheat grass, ventenata and medusahead will likely establish and prevail, causing long-term impacts within the project area and adjoining lands. The analysis should include the ability to use the herbicide Rejuvra® to successfully control cheatgrass and other weeds in the project area.

We strongly recommend the Amendment include a full and thorough social and economic impact analysis. Since grazing on public lands represents a vital economic value to livestock grazing permittees and local communities, we specifically suggest the analysis includes impacts on livestock grazing in and adjacent to potential development areas. The cumulative impacts of energy development on livestock grazing management has the potential to jeopardize the livelihood of livestock grazing permittees.

In addition to its economic value, livestock grazing represents irreplaceable environmental and social values contributing to the preservation of open spaces, scenic and visual beauty of Wyoming and the traditional image of the historic rural landscapes of the West. Loss of these important environmental, historic, and social values of livestock grazing to users and visitors of the area and residents of impacted communities along with the social impacts, should be included in the scope of the study and included in the Amendment.

Grazing is an essential tool to achieve desired environmental objectives in the planning area, including obtaining positive effects on food and habitat for both wildlife and livestock. The analysis needs to include 1) positive effects of livestock grazing upon the environment and as a tool to achieve environmental objectives and 2) the impacts of this project on limiting the ability of livestock grazing management to achieve these positive effects.

The Amendment should identify the need for BLM staff, historic grazing permittees, and private landowners to work cooperatively. WDA recommends BLM develop a proposed alternative with flexibility to make the best site-specific, case-by-case decisions in the best interests of the affected resources and citizens throughout the life of this plan.

BFO Resource Management Plan Amendment

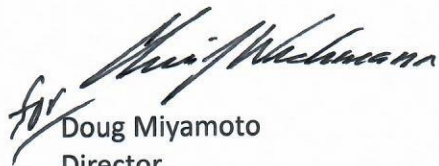
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Page 3 of 3

The WDA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the scope of the proposed Amendment. We encourage continued attention to our concerns and we look forward to BLM including the WDA as a Cooperating Agency for all future meetings and the development of the range of alternatives.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Linda Cope, Senior Policy Analyst, at 307-777-7024.

Sincerely,


for
Doug Miyamoto
Director

DM/lc

CC: Governor's Policy Office
Wyoming Board of Agriculture
Wyoming Stock Growers Association
Wyoming Wool Growers Association
Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation
Wyoming State Grazing Board
Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts
Wyoming Game and Fish Department
Wyoming County Commissioners Association
Public Lands Council