

April 17, 2019

**BY ELECTRONIC MAIL  
AND U.S. EXPRESS MAIL**

David Bernhardt  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

**Re: Request for Extension of the Public Comment Period, Supplemental Environmental Assessment for Wyoming Oil and Gas Leases, DOI-BLM-WY-0000-2019-0007-EA**

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

The undersigned request an extension of the public comment deadline related to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's ("BLM's") Supplemental Environmental Assessment for the May 2015-August 2016 Oil and Gas Leases Sold and Issued (EA No. DOI-BLM-WY-0000-2019-0007-EA).

This Environmental Assessment, which is nearly 70 pages long, was posted online late in the day on Friday April 12, 2019. According to the BLM, the public has 10 days to submit comments, placing the deadline at April 22, 2019. Given the late release on Friday and accounting for weekends, this effectively gives the public six days to weigh in. This is an extraordinarily short amount of time to review the Environmental Assessment and provide meaningful and helpful comments to the BLM. Accordingly, we request an extension and that the BLM provide 30 additional days for the public to review and comment. This would put the deadline on May 22, 2019.

That the BLM's 10 day comment period is unreasonable is underscored by the fact that the agency routinely provides 30 days for the public to submit comments on Environmental Assessments. The BLM in Wyoming currently provides 30 days for the public to submit comments on Environmental Assessments prepared in conjunction with oil and gas leasing. *See e.g.* <https://www.blm.gov/press-release/blm-wyoming-seeks-input-june-2019-lease-sale-proposal> (informing the public of a 30 day period to submit comments on proposed oil and gas leasing in Wyoming in June 2019).

While the BLM asserts the public had an opportunity to comment in 2015 and 2016 on the issues addressed in the Supplemental Environmental Assessment, the public has had no prior opportunity to comment on the specific analysis and conclusions in the Environmental Assessment. This document is brand new and the public deserves more time to review and to provide informative feedback.

Further, an extension of time to submit comments is all the more reasonable in light of the intense amount of public interest and controversy around the agency's analysis. The

Supplemental Environmental Assessment was prepared in response to a March 19, 2019 federal court ruling that held the BLM failed to properly account for the climate impacts of leasing public lands for oil and gas development. *See WildEarth Guardians v Zinke*, No. 1:16-cv-01724-RC. This ruling and the underlying issue of climate change has generated intense public discourse, including extensive media coverage and commentary even from members of Congress. It behooves the BLM to provide the interested public, regardless of their perspective on the matter, a sufficient amount of time to review and respond. 10 days is simply not enough.

The National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”) requires the BLM to “[e]ncourage and facilitate public involvement” and to “[m]ake diligent efforts to involve the public.” 40 C.F.R. §§ 1500.2(d) and 1506.6(a). The BLM’s own NEPA Handbook recognizes that providing a reasonable public comment period is done to “allow the public, agencies and tribes the opportunity to respond to the analysis of impacts and to further long-term collaborative efforts.” BLM NEPA Handbook, H-1790-1, at 8.4.2. A 10 day public comment period that is functionally a six day public comment period neither encourages nor facilitates public involvement, does not represent diligent efforts to involve the public, and does not suffice to ensure that the public, agencies, and tribes have the opportunity to respond to the BLM and collaborate.

Please provide us with more time to help the BLM. Please provide an additional 30 days to review the Supplemental Environmental Assessment and to submit comments.

We request a written response to this request. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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