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COUNTY OF PARK
Board of County
Commissioners



January 3, 2017

Senator Bennett
Senator Gardner
Congressman Polis
Congressman Tipton

RE: BLM's Planning 2.0 is good for the West

Dear Senator's & Congressman,

As the chair of a county commission representing some of the most beautiful country in the Rocky Mountain West—much of it publicly accessible for all Americans—We believe there is good reason to be encouraged by the Bureau of Land Management's Planning 2.0 to bring its planning into the 21st century.

Their new initiative, called Planning 2.0, represents the BLM's first major update of its planning strategy for the management of 245 million acres of national public lands since the early 1980s. As we all know, a lot has changed in the West over the past three decades. Competing demands for resources and challenges with invasive species, wildfires, and drought make land-use planning very difficult, and this means that we all need to roll up our sleeves and work together to solve problems.

One of the biggest shortfalls of the old BLM planning process is the lack of transparency. The public submits comments at the beginning of the process and the agency seems to disappear for a long period of time before coming back and proposing a draft plan. It doesn't matter who is involved, it is hard for most folks to stay engaged and feel like their input is being taken seriously. The old BLM planning process is generating some of the frustration that people are voicing towards federal lands management.

The BLM is addressing this issue through Planning 2.0 by providing earlier and more frequent opportunities for our constituents to weigh in on BLM decisions. Under 2.0, the agency would seek public comment and ideas at the start of the process and would then release a preliminary set of management options for public feedback before issuing a draft plan. With this system, the public will have more opportunity to help shape the document before anything is locked in. The goal is to address concerns, potential conflicts, and other problems upfront. Another change would enable the BLM to take a landscape-level look at the planning area. As we all know, rivers and elk herds don't stop and turn around at the local BLM field office boundary.

Under Planning 2.0, the BLM would have the flexibility to plan across larger landscapes when it makes sense for the resources under consideration. The 2.0 process is good, common sense, and it would enable the agency to make better informed decisions.

All of these changes would be made while maintaining the pivotal role of local cooperators, including county commissioners, who have a unique and important role in the land use planning process. The BLM is currently using the Planning 2.0 principles as it updates public land management plans in Park County, where I live and work, and we are seeing firsthand some of these proposed changes.

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The plan undergoing revision for eastern Colorado will determine the future management of millions of acres of public lands over the next 20+ years, affecting outdoorsmen, grazers, loggers, miners, and conservationists.

It is important that we get it right, and from what we've seen, the proposal put into practice is beneficial for these lands and our community.

As Planning 2.0 gains support where it is actually being put into effect, you'd think this would be something that everyone could get behind. But some decision makers in Washington, D.C., want to make political points off Planning 2.0.

As a Western official with a focus on real solutions, I don't find this very amusing. All of the hard work and good intentions that are going into our local land-use planning efforts and the management of Park County public lands are being threatened by this political posturing.

The BLM is finally on to something good, and we want to see it through to completion.

Regards,

Mike Brazell, Chairman for the Park County Commissioners