

Local input matters: Why you should comment on BLM planning documents

Say what? Local input matters? Absolutely! Did you know every time the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes a new activity or project on public lands, there is an opportunity for public feedback? The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA – pronounced “nee-puh”) requires that federal agencies prepare documents that analyze how those projects or activities will affect things like the environment, social and economic balance, and other public land uses/users. Those documents are available for review before anything is implemented on the ground. Documents are written with a basic purpose and need for the proposal, discussion on how it impacts public lands/natural resources, and alternatives on how to implement it.

For the Burns District, if there is a NEPA document available for input, a public notice will be printed in the Classifieds section of the Burns Times Herald, and sometimes also in a full article. If you miss the newspaper posting, you can always go online to the BLM’s planning documents website: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/>

Instead of typing that too-long web address, a simple Google search of “ePlanning BLM” will bring up the same link for you to click on. Once you find a document that appeals to you (you can apply a number of search filters on the site to narrow-down what types of projects or activities you are interested in), review it. If it is currently open for public comment, **PROVIDE YOUR INPUT!** The more input available, the more opportunity for the best decision making.

Public comments that provide relevant, new information, and have sufficient detail are most useful and are referred to as “substantive comments.” A substantive comment does one or more of the following: questions the accuracy of information in the document; questions the adequacy, methodology, or assumptions used in the analysis; presents reasonable new alternatives to what is proposed; and/or causes changes or revisions to existing alternatives.

At the close of a comment period, the BLM reviews all comments and may make changes to a proposed project or activity based on public feedback. Form letters are considered as one comment – quality is a higher priority than quantity. Non-substantive comments are statements like “I am opposed to the proposal” or “I support the proposal.” In either case, unless you describe the reason why, these types of comments are of minimal value during the review.

The bottom line: support or opposition, **THE BLM NEEDS YOUR INPUT.** Be involved! Join Resource Advisory Councils. Attend meetings of various groups in the community (Harney County Farm Bureau, Harney County Court, Steens Mountain Advisory Council, High Desert Partnership, Harney Restoration Collaborative, Harney County Cattlewomen, etc.). Ask questions. Reach out. Speak up. Be effective!

