

SAN RAFAEL DESERT

MASTER LEASING PLAN

Preliminary Alternatives



BLM-UTAH

Dear Stakeholders,

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Price and Richfield Field Offices are seeking public comments on the preliminary alternatives for the San Rafael Desert (SRD) Master Leasing Plan (MLP). Your comments will be considered as we evaluate oil and gas leasing decisions in the planning area.

The BLM last requested comments from the public on this project during a scoping period in May and June of 2016. The preliminary alternatives were developed using that public feedback. The preliminary alternatives also take into consideration input that we have received from our cooperating agencies, which include the State of Utah, Emery and Wayne Counties, the National Park Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Requesting comments on the preliminary alternatives is an extra step to the BLM's usual planning process. We are asking for your thoughts and ideas now to ensure that the range of alternatives that we are considering appropriately address issues that are important to you, our stakeholders.

Please submit comments on the preliminary alternatives by January 20, 2017.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Ahmed Mohsen

Field Office Manager

Price Field Office

Bureau of Land Management

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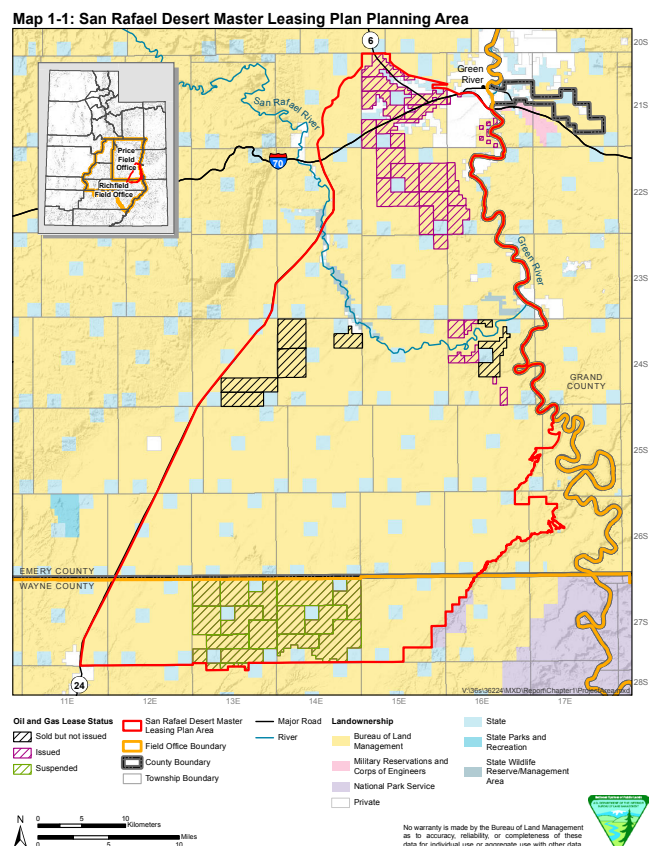
MASTER LEASING PLAN

What is a Master Leasing Plan?

The Bureau Land Management (BLM) prepares Resource Management Plans (RMPs) that include oil and gas planning decisions, such as areas closed to leasing, open to leasing, or open to leasing with major or moderate constraints (i.e., lease stipulations). A Master Leasing Plan (MLP) is a stepped-down leasing analysis that gives the BLM an opportunity to analyze in greater detail the impacts of leasing and development in areas where there are likely resource conflicts. MLPs are completed in areas where there are mostly unleased and undeveloped lands that have been proposed for oil and gas leasing and development, such as the San Rafael Desert. MLPs serve as a road map to guide the orderly development of oil and gas resources, while also providing protections for other important resources.

Where is the San Rafael Desert planning area?

The planning area is located in Emery and Wayne counties in Utah and encompasses approximately 525,000 acres of public land that are primarily located south of Interstate 70 and east of Highway 24. The eastern boundary of the MLP planning area is generally the Green River. A small portion of the MLP area is located north of Interstate 70, west of the City of Green River, UT, and east of the San Rafael Swell. U.S. Highway 6 bisects this part of the planning area.





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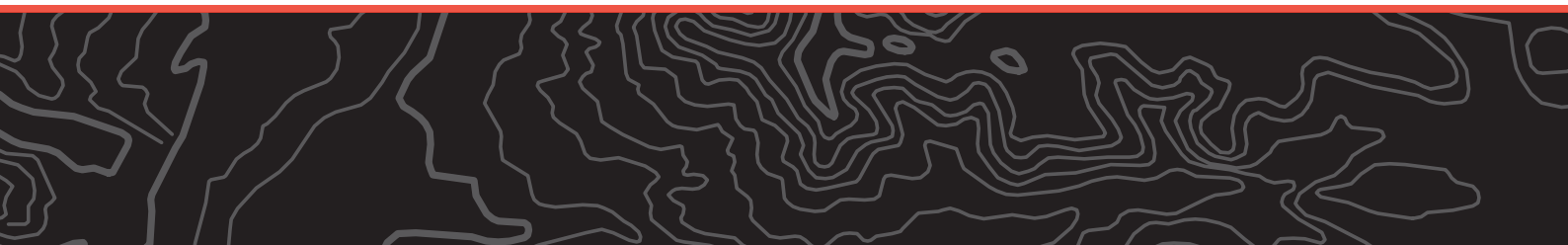
Why is the BLM preparing a Master Leasing Plan in the San Rafael Desert?

The San Rafael Desert MLP is being prepared to implement new oil and gas leasing policy, to resolve long-standing lease protests, and complete supplemental NEPA for leases which were placed in suspension because of litigation.

Of particular importance in this planning process is the resolution of 16 suspended oil and gas leases in the San Rafael Desert planning area. Prior to allowing any action on these leases, the BLM must analyze the impacts of leasing on lands with wilderness characteristics. Following the completion of this analysis, the BLM will issue a new decision on each lease and may cancel or modify the leases, or lift the lease suspensions.

What will the San Rafael Desert Master Leasing Plan accomplish?

The San Rafael Desert MLP will enable the Price and Richfield Field Offices to (1) resolve long-standing lease protests related to parcels of land for which the BLM received lease offers subject to protest but for which the BLM has not issued leases in the planning area; (2) determine whether the BLM should cancel, modify, or lift the suspensions on suspended leases in the planning area; (3) evaluate potential development scenarios; (4) identify and address potential resource conflicts and environmental impacts from oil and gas development; (5) create mitigation strategies for oil and gas development; and (6) consider a range of new conditions, including prohibiting surface occupancy or closing certain areas to leasing.





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What other agencies are involved in the planning process?

The BLM invited eligible federal agencies, state, and local governments to participate as cooperating agencies in this planning process. These agencies were invited to participate because they have jurisdiction by law or have special expertise. Five agencies agreed to serve as cooperating agencies. These agencies include:

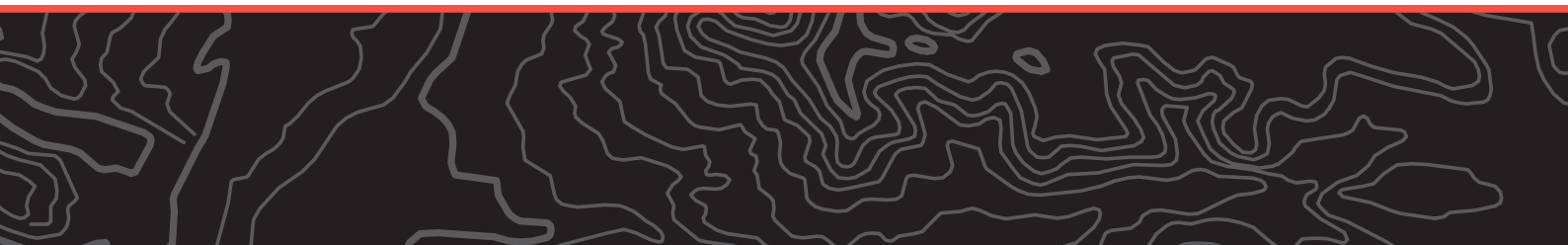
- State of Utah
- Emery County
- Wayne County
- Environmental Protection Agency
- National Park Service

The cooperating agencies have been actively involved in the alternative development process.

In addition to working with other federal agencies and state and local governments, the BLM is engaged in consultation with interested Native American tribes.

Where are we at in the Planning Process?

The San Rafael Desert MLP is being completed in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). NEPA was adopted to ensure that environment and social impacts of actions carried out, approved, or funded by the Federal government are carefully examined. FLPMA requires the BLM to prepare land use plans based on the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. Public lands in the San Rafael Desert planning area are currently managed under the Price and Richfield RMPs, which were completed in 2008.



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In accordance with NEPA and FLPMA, the BLM is preparing this MLP, and RMP amendments with a single Environmental Assessment. These plan amendments are focused exclusively on management decisions pertaining to oil and gas resources in the San Rafael Desert planning area.

The BLM first requested comments from the public on this project during a public scoping period in May and June of 2016. The scoping period included two public scoping meetings held in Green River and Castle Dale, Utah.

Since completion of the public scoping period, the BLM has been working with cooperating agencies on the development of preliminary alternatives. The preliminary alternatives were developed using public feedback.

The BLM is now requesting feedback on the preliminary alternatives. Requesting comments on the preliminary alternatives is an extra step to the BLM's usual planning and NEPA process. We are asking for your thoughts and ideas now to ensure that the range of alternatives that we are considering appropriately address important issues.

What did the BLM hear from the public during scoping?

Many people have interest in how oil and gas is managed in this region. During the scoping process the BLM received approximately 350 comments that were extracted from approximately 20 unique comment letters. In addition, the BLM received a large volume of form letters. The BLM heard concerns about impacts on many resources as well as the local economy.





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The most common concerns included impacts to Horseshoe Canyon, which is part of Canyonlands National Park, and Labyrinth Canyon, which is a calm and beautiful segment of the Green River. Other concerns identified by the public included impacts to air quality, climate change, cultural resources, paleontological resources, visual resources, night skies, natural soundscapes, recreation, wilderness characteristics, soil and water resources, special status species, vegetation, and wildlife and fisheries.

Many people have different views on how these issues should be addressed. The alternatives reflect those different views.

What is included in the preliminary alternatives?

The BLM has developed four preliminary alternatives that are intended to address issues raised by the public during the scoping process. They also consider alternative means or mechanisms of addressing those issues. Brief summaries and maps of each alternative are included below. The full preliminary alternatives table is available for your review at the following location. Other background documents, including the recent wilderness characteristics inventory findings, are also available for your review.

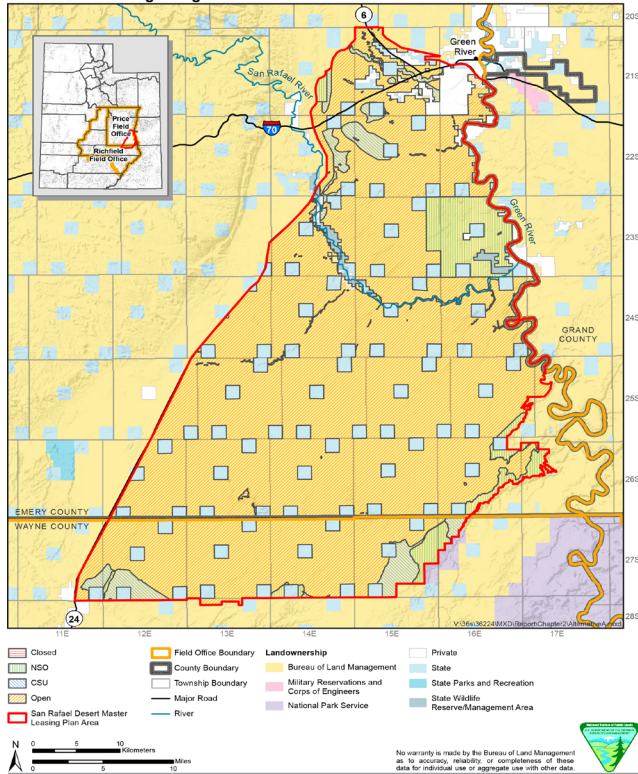
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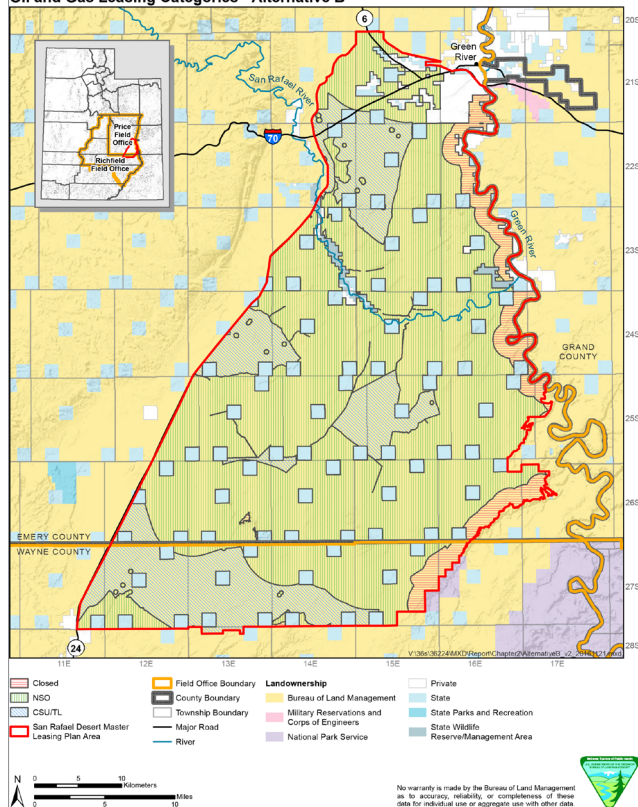
Oil and Gas Leasing Categories - Alternative A



Alternative A

Alternative A is the No Action Alternative and is a continuation of current management direction contained in the Price and Richfield RMPs, which were completed in 2008. Under the current RMPs, the majority of lands in the San Rafael Desert planning are open to leasing with no specific constraints. New oil and gas leasing would generally be subject to standard lease terms and applicable laws, regulations, and orders. Mitigation measures could be considered on a site-specific basis during the development phase to minimize environmental or social impacts.

Oil and Gas Leasing Categories - Alternative B



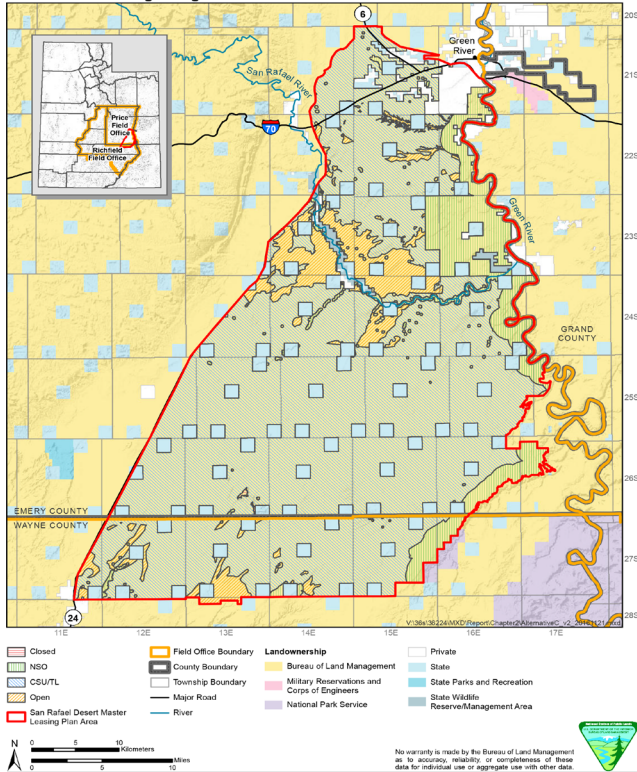
Alternative B

Alternative B was developed in response to comments that suggested that major constraints should be placed on oil and gas leasing and development in most of the San Rafael Desert due to impacts to recreation, wilderness characteristics, cultural and historic resources, and natural ecosystems. Under this alternative, oil and gas leasing would be allowed in most of the planning area, but stipulations would prohibit use or occupancy of the surface for exploration and mineral development. Where possible, minerals under public lands that have surface use restrictions could be accessed by directionally or horizontally drilling from nearby lands that do not have a surface use limitations. Areas within 1-mile of the Green River and Horseshoe Canyon would be closed to leasing.

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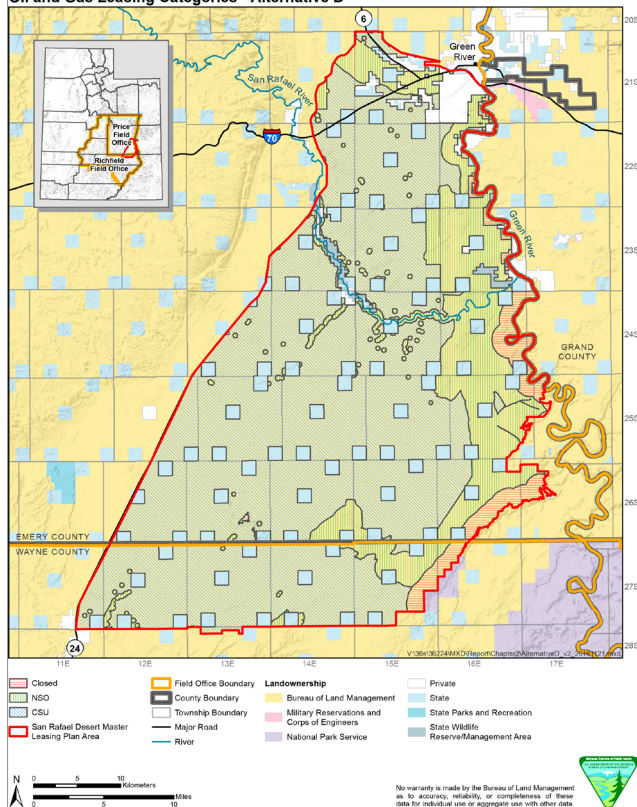
Oil and Gas Leasing Categories - Alternative C



Alternative C

Alternative C is designed to be consistent with State and local plans. This alternative recognizes the importance of resources such as Horseshoe Canyon and Labyrinth Canyon, and considers additional surface use constraints in these areas. Providing opportunity for oil and gas leasing and development is prioritized in other portions of the planning area. Minor constraints would be placed on development through most of the region to minimize impacts to other scenic and recreational resources and natural ecosystems.

Oil and Gas Leasing Categories - Alternative D



Alternative D

Similar to Alternative C, this alternative recognizes the importance of resources such as Horseshoe Canyon and Labyrinth Canyon. However, Alternative D places additional surface use restrictions on public lands surrounding these areas that have wilderness characteristics and important scenic and recreation values. This alternative recognizes the increased public interest in the San Rafael Desert and the importance of minimizing resource conflicts by protecting recreational opportunities and experiences from the impacts of oil and gas leasing and development. Moderate constraints would be placed on development through the rest of the region to minimize impacts to natural landscapes and ecosystems.

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Comparison of Alternatives

The table below includes a summary of the preliminary alternatives.

Oil and Gas Leasing Decisions					
	Open	Minor or Moderate Constraints	Major Constraints	Closed	Total
Alternative A	398,957	19,038	32,946	193	451,134
Alternative B	0	97,676	324,508	28,950	451,134
Alternative C	37,817	362,175	50,949	193	451,134
Alternative D	0	339,835	91,684	19,615	451,134

How can I submit comments to the BLM?

The BLM will accept written comments by letter or email. Commenters should reference San Rafael Desert MLP alternatives.

Written comments should be mailed to:

BLM Price Field Office
125 South 600 West
Price, UT 84501

Email comments should be directed to:

BLM_UT_PR_MAIL@blm.gov

In order for your comments to be taken into consideration, they must be submitted by January 20, 2017.

What are the Next Steps in the MLP process?

After the public review of the preliminary alternatives is completed, the BLM will evaluate whether it should modify the current range of alternatives. Once the alternatives have been modified, the BLM, in coordination with the cooperating agencies, will analyze the physical, biological, economic, and social effects of implementing each alternative. The results of this analysis will be included in a draft RMP amendment and environmental assessment that the BLM will make available for public review.