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DEPARTMENT of ANTHROPOLOGY

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July 21, 2014

Jesse Juen
U.S. Bureau of Land Management
New Mexico State Office
PO Box 27115
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502

Dear Mr. Juen and BLM Staff,

I am writing to formally protest the offering of public lands for lease (NM-2014-001, 004 through 015), which are in the Rio Chama Watershed and East of the Continental Divide. I am a professor of anthropology at the University of New Mexico with expertise in community based natural resource management. Since 2011 I have been the Lead Researcher on a multi-sited research project titled: Political Economies of Energy. The project was developed in collaboration with local residents of Rio Arriba County where the leases are located. Our research examines community participation in oil and gas development in the state of New Mexico. In particular we are focusing on how everyday residents of areas undergoing development participate in the decision making process. I have been working closely with diverse residents of Rio Arriba County for the past 3 years.

Oil and gas exploitation is typically viewed through ecological lenses related to land and water as well as economic frameworks involving rights to profit. This dangerously excludes understandings of how power operates through historical and contemporary relationships and institutions. Oil and gas exploitation – like any other form of exploitation – are related to issues of sovereignty and social justice and do not constitute a detached or exceptional event. In other words, oil and gas development happen in a context of already existing unequal relationships and structures of power that I urge the BLM to consider in earnest.

NM stands out from other parts of the US in terms of energy production. First, NM land ownership and use is a mix of public, private, and collectively held titles in social, economic, and political contexts that span three different colonizing forces. Second, New Mexico is a historic and contemporary national sacrifice zone. For nuevomexicanos and their allies the struggle is at once over natural resources and local authority; in short, a struggle over sovereign dignified life.

Statement of Reasons

A finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the October 22, 2014 Oil and Gas Lease Sale is not adequately supported by the Environmental Assessment as it now stands. Our research identified three major issues that require consideration before leases are made:

1. *The BLM process does not consider or account for social justice.* Over the past two years residents of Rio Arriba County and the Planning and Zoning Department have insisted that growth cannot come at the cost

of the very qualities that brought and keep residents in the area. Important questions that emerged from our research with county residents and officials include: Why have generation after generation chosen to live in Rio Arriba County and why are people still coming today? How can residents remain in the County with good jobs, land, and water to live their lives? These are questions related to social justice: the right to remain or live with dignity in one's homeland, free of displacement and dispossession. These questions are not addressed by the environmental justice criteria for the EA. How can the BLM address social justice alongside environmental justice?

2. *Throughout the BLM decision-making process the concept of culture has been framed as something that is historical, related to the past, and in need of preservation rather than a contemporary feature of human practices.* Anthropology since the 1960s to the present has considered culture not something people possess, such as tradition, but rather a constantly changing feature of everyday life. More specifically culture is the process of negotiating power to live life on one's own terms, in this case as the contemporary residents of Rio Arriba County. The BLM is working off of an understanding of culture as the preservation of static tradition and sacred sites. This indicates an understanding of the local residents in essentialized or stereotypical terms and a reified notion of community as unchanging and backward, all of which have little to do with contemporary life in the County. How can the BLM consider culture differently and assist in developing dignified life in Rio Arriba County?
3. *The BLM decision-making process and timeline codify an asymmetrical power relationship allowing for no alternatives.* Our research shows that residents of the County are most effective – culture is better considered – when they are allowed to participate in the amending of county ordinances rather than when forced to participate in other processes or be left out entirely. The residents and officials of Rio Arriba County made a sharp critique of the limits of liberal democratic state-led processes, such as the NEPA process. They argued against democracy as majority rule and in favor of public input in order to create rules and regulations for collective welfare. The public hearings organized around amending the oil and gas ordinance over the past two years as well as the community mapping work best exemplify the effectiveness of community-led participation and local culture. As an anthropologist I argue that decentering decision-making and re-centering governance as pluralistic regulation built from the ground up – for example through coalitions between residents and local government – is most effective at meeting the needs of states and civil society.

To these ends I urge the BLM to recognize local expertise and allow the community along with the County officials to complete the process of amending the existing oil and gas ordinance. Furthermore, I ask that the BLM adhere to this ordinance and its amendments before the leases are made. Finally, I request that the BLM address the issues that emerged from our research regarding social justice, culture, and decision-making alternatives.

Sincerely,



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