BLM Resource Advisory Councils

Partners Across The West

Northwest Resource Advisory Council

August 19, 2010

Jamie Connell
Designated Federal Officer, Northwest Resource Advisory Council
2815 H Road
Grand Junction, CO 81506

Dear Ms. Connell,

The NW Resource Advisory Council has a long history of supporting locally driven planning processes and has strongly supported local proposals rather than top-down-Washington orders for federal land management. The Little Snake BLM Office led unprecedented public involvement and "ground-up" solutions in many aspects of the Little Snake Field Office Resource Management Plan. BLM accomplished this involvement by effectively utilizing a diverse community group as well as the Cooperating Agencies. Solutions to sage grouse habitat fragmentation and Vermillion Basin management were two solutions derived from the diverse opinions represented in the public process. In both areas, although some interests were not completely satisfied and consensus was not completely reached, the NW RAC believes that sound management balancing the interests was obtained by BLM. One of those proposals was a 1% surface disturbance proposal which protected 99% of the surface of Vermillion Basin at any given time from natural gas development, while only utilizing 1% of the surface for natural gas extraction. BLM wholly endorsed the proposal for 1% disturbance at any given time in Vermillion Basin, even after a second review of its application two years after the original recommendation. Then, four years after the original recommendation (1 month ago), BLM reversed its support of the Vermillion proposal with no new science or land management knowledge.

Until July 2010, BLM's study of the issue unequivocally found that protecting 99% of Vermillion Basin at a given time afforded the environmental protections needed in the Basin, while still providing for the local economy. Then the Washington BLM office overturned the Little Snake Field Office and told them that no drilling would be allowed in Vermillion Basin with no explanation for undoing four years of public process other than a generic answer of "information provided from public comment" had influenced BLM's decision.

The NW RAC has a long tradition of supporting locally driven land management planning and decisions. If BLM's decision to not allow 1% drilling in Vermillion Basin is allowed to stand, it undermines any value in the collaborative process. The NW RAC hereby opposes the top-down approach used by Washington to override BLM's recommendation of the 1% Vermillion Basin proposal and we further request a Record of Decision not be issued with the "no leasing" position in Vermillion Basin.

Sincerely,

P. Kennedy

Patrick Kennedy, Chair, Northwest Resource Advisory Council