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September 27, 2024

The Honorable Tracy Stone-Manning
Director
Bureau of Land Management
1849 C St, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Stone-Manning,

On August 29, 2024, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced its Final Environmental Impact Assessment (FEIS) and corresponding Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) for the proposed Utility Scale Solar Energy Development Plan. This proposal provides a framework for solar energy development in 11 Western states on 31 million acres of federal lands and will weaken the resilience of the American energy grid while stripping local communities of important revenue-generating activities. We request that the BLM rescind the rule.

The RMPA will have serious implications regarding current uses of public lands, the ability of Western states and their municipalities to work with the BLM's field offices, and access to affordable and reliable energy sources. While the stated purpose of the BLM is to identify "solar application areas" where BLM anticipates there will be fewer resource conflicts than identified exclusion areas—areas likely to encounter significant resource conflicts—the BLM has said nothing about how conflicts between resources will be managed. It is clear that BLM already selected the winners and losers in these scenarios, given that the justification for the RMPA is to support "renewable and climate goals" in order to "reduce the impacts of climate change."

The entire premise of this proposal is incompatible with the type of environmental standards that ought to be upheld by the BLM, as it replaces environmentally and economically efficient activities with vast surface-altering impairments. Traditional energy sources like fossil fuels can be extracted with a much smaller footprint on the surface estate compared to solar panels. Fossil fuel extraction, such as drilling for oil or natural gas, typically requires only a few well pads and access roads, leaving the majority of the land surface undisturbed. In contrast, solar energy development necessitates covering large swaths of land with solar panels, which can significantly alter the landscape and disrupt ecosystems. As a result, fossil fuel extraction has a comparatively reduced environmental impact on the surface of public lands, preserving more natural habitats and minimizing the visual and ecological disturbances that extensive solar installations cause.

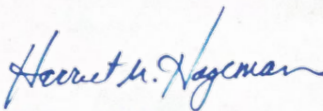
Under the RMPA the BLM states that “lands would be excluded from utility-scale solar energy application based on certain exclusion criteria.” The remaining public lands would be available for solar applications where they are within a certain range of designated energy corridors, or on previously disturbed lands. The proposed plan reflects the interests of extreme environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) who have actively attempted to undermine American energy independence by raising the distance from a maximum of 10 miles to 15 and lowering the voltage thresholds from 100 kV to 69 kV. This simple change puts 9 million additional acres up for grabs for unreliable energy companies. Additionally, the BLM will not allow powerlines to be built where they are needed. Having land marked as open to solar panels based on theoretical powerlines which do not currently exist is no way to strengthen America’s energy grid, and certainly not an appropriate way to make land designations. This use of hypothetical transmission lines artificially increases the proposed amount of land available for solar construction under the fifteen-mile restriction.

The BLM also received extensive comments expressing concern about grazing limitations—which largely go unaddressed in the FEIS. The BLM is intentionally ignoring the legitimate concerns of ranchers. The BLM acknowledges that all area outside of the exclusion areas are likely to become incompatible with grazing. In the RMPA, over 29.9 million acres of grazing allotments would overlap the lands available for utility scale solar application. The BLM claims that potential impacts to grazing range from 53.2 million acres to 8 million acres—and flexes these possibilities as having a relatively small impact due to the fact that it would leave “91% of the total lands available for application.” This is no small feat and, if anything, attests to the sheer size of this unjustified land grab.

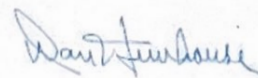
This proposal also reflects the inability of the unreliable energy industry to compete on its own. Why else would the federal government step in to eliminate conflict over other potential uses of public lands? Clearly unreliable energy sources cannot generate state and federal revenue as other traditional uses—let alone supply communities with the power they need with minimal impact on surface lands. Unreliable energy, particularly wind and solar, received a collective total of \$15.6 billion in federal government handouts in fiscal year 2022—and a total of almost \$70 billion from 2018 to 2022.¹ The Biden-Harris Administration is artificially propping up the renewable energy industry by subsidizing energy sources that cannot stand by themselves in a completely free market, stealing vast swaths of land from other productive uses in the process.

This proposal is nothing more than yet another land grab from the Biden-Harris Administration that invades America’s public lands at the behest of companies who live or die on the taxpayer dollar. We demand that the BLM immediately withdraw this proposal.

Sincerely,

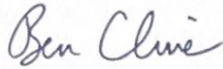


Harriet M. Hageman
Member of Congress



Dan Newhouse
Chairman, Western Caucus

¹ [Renewable energy the big winner when it comes to federal subsidies | Just The News](#)



Ben Cline
Member of Congress



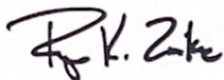
Lauren Boebert
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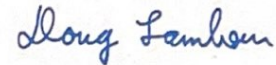
Ryan Zinke
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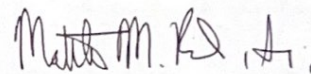
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