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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON  
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6150

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August 10, 2016

The Honorable Neil Kornze  
Director  
Bureau of Land Management  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Request for Extended Protest Period on the Proposed Regional Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Eastern Interior Planning Area of Alaska

Dear Director Kornze:

I am extremely disappointed with the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Proposed Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (Proposed Plan) for the Eastern Interior Planning Area of Alaska. In order to provide Alaskans with sufficient time to review and protest this sweeping document, I urgently request that you extend the current protest period by 90 days and establish a supplemental protest period during the month of October 2016.

Either the massive volume of the Proposed Plan or the remarkably poor timing of its public release would alone justify an extension. Taken together, these factors demand an extension of time to comment.

The Proposed Plan spans 1,791 pages and comes with a separate document filled with 131 pages of maps. At more than 819,000 words, the Proposed Plan is roughly 40 percent longer than the epic novel *War and Peace*—not to mention, far more technical and complex. Even if the average Alaskan set aside time to pore over 10 pages every day of the week, it would still take six full months to read the Proposed Plan in its entirety.

Unfortunately, many Alaskans have no choice but to attempt to do just that. The Proposed Plan encompasses a total of 6.5 million acres in a region where thousands of Alaskans make their livelihoods. BLM's preferred "hybrid" alternative appears to contain new information, requirements, and restrictions that have never been subject to public review. The agency is seeking to limit access, recommending that "74 percent of BLM-managed lands remain closed to both mineral leasing and mineral location." BLM is also planning to withdraw more than one million acres of land through the designation of new Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and has included alternatives that could increase that figure to nearly three million acres.

I also strongly object to the timing of the release of this Proposed Plan. August is the height of mining activity, fishing season, and the beginning of hunting season in Alaska. Thousands of local residents who stand to be most affected by this Proposed Plan are hard at work right now, frequently in remote areas that have limited or no access to the internet or mail service. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game – located in Anchorage – received its hard copy of the Proposed Plan on August 4. It is reasonable to assume that individuals in rural Alaska, who rely on paper copies to evaluate regulatory activity, are not yet even aware of its issuance.

The deliberate timing of BLM's release means that countless Alaskans who stand to be affected by the Proposed Plan will not even know that it has been issued – let alone have a chance to properly review it – by the time the current 30-day protest period comes to a close. Again, given the expansive scope of this document, virtually no one who actually does become aware of it will have enough time to read all four of its volumes and develop their substantive comments.

Rather than subverting Alaskans' rights to participate in the land management process and understand how regulatory decisions will impact us, I urge BLM to extend the current 30-day protest period by 90 additional days. I also encourage BLM to follow the example set by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in this region. In 2014, that agency both extended the comment period on a revised general permit for placer miners and established a supplemental comment period in October of that year. This enabled Alaskans who would not otherwise have been able to comment to have a meaningful opportunity to make their views known.

There is no valid reason why BLM cannot and should not do the same with regard to its Proposed Plan. Accordingly, I ask that you extend the protest period to 120 days in total and establish a supplemental protest period during October.

I look forward to your help in ensuring that the people of Alaska have sufficient time to read, understand, and react to BLM's latest resource management plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa Murkowski".

Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senator

cc: Mr. Bud Cribley, Alaska BLM Director