

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

July 16, 2024

The Honorable Debra Haaland
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

We write to express our strong opposition to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)'s proposed amendment to the Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Buffalo Field Office. The proposed amendment will severely affect the people of Wyoming and the state's economy. It would also put electric reliability across the country at risk. We urge you to rescind this amendment.

Wyoming leads the nation in coal production. Roughly 40 percent of all coal mined in the United States comes from Wyoming. Most of this coal is produced on federal lands in the Powder River Basin (PRB).¹ PRB coal is shipped to 27² states and critical to maintaining reliable electric service to tens of millions of Americans and thousands of communities. BLM's proposed amendment would prevent future coal leasing and block access to 48 billion short tons of coal in Wyoming.

The proposed amendment directly violates the multiple use mandate that Congress gave BLM in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. The Act requires the BLM to manage federal lands in a way that "recognizes the Nation's needs for domestic sources of minerals." When questioned on the proposed amendment before the U.S. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, BLM Director, Tracy Stone-Manning, argued that "the president has asked us to turn and transition to a clean energy economy."³ However, President Biden's desire for a carbon free grid is no substitute for, or a reason for BLM to abandon, its statutory mandate.

BLM's proposed amendment would also put electric reliability at risk. It is widely estimated that U.S. demand for electricity will surge in the coming decades. As that happens, it is imperative that we maintain our nation's baseload coal-fired electric generation. In 2023, James Danly, a member of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, warned of "an impending, but

¹ "Wyoming State Profile and Energy Estimates." U.S. Energy Information Administration, June 20, 2024, <https://www.eia.gov/state/?sid=WY>.

² "Annual Coal Distribution Report." U.S. Energy Information Agency, October 2023, https://www.eia.gov/coal/distribution/annual/pdf/acdr_2022.pdf.

³ *Full Committee Hearing to Conduct Oversight of the Bureau of Land Management*, 118th Congress (2024). <https://www.energy.senate.gov/hearings/2024/6/full-committee-hearing-to-conduct-oversight-of-the-bureau-of-land-management>.

avoidable, reliability crisis” caused by “public policies that are otherwise designed...to drive fossil-fuel generators out of business as quickly as possible.”⁴ Likewise, Commissioner Mark Christie warned of a looming “reliability crisis” if “the far too rapid *subtraction* of dispatchable resources, especially coal and gas” continues.⁵ Wyoming’s PRB is the nation’s single richest and most affordable source of thermal coal in the country. Blocking access to 48 billion short tons of this coal will only add to the financial pressure that owners of coal-fired power plants face.

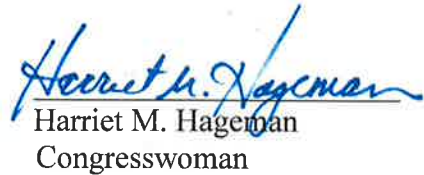
In addition, BLM’s proposed amendment would have a severe impact on Wyoming. Revenue from federal coal leases funds K-12 public education, infrastructure, and other essential services. BLM’s own analysis acknowledges that ending coal leasing jeopardizes thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars to the state. Eliminating these jobs and revenue would have a devastating effect on the people, families, and communities of Wyoming. We, therefore, urge you, in the strongest terms, to withdraw BLM’s proposed amendment to the Buffalo RMP.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,


John Barrasso, M.D.
U.S. Senator


Cynthia Lummis
U.S. Senator


Harriet M. Hageman
Congresswoman

⁴ *Written Testimony of James P. Danly, Commissioner, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Before the Committee on Energy & Natural Resources, United States Senate, 118th Congress (2023) (James Danley).* <https://www.energy.senate.gov/hearings/2023/5/full-committee-hearing-to-conduct-oversight-of-ferc>.

⁵ *Opening Statement of Mark C. Christie, Commissioner, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Hearing, United States Senate, 118th Congress (2023) (Mark Christie).* <https://www.energy.senate.gov/hearings/2023/5/full-committee-hearing-to-conduct-oversight-of-ferc>.