



Senator John Barrasso
June 21, 2016
Public Lands, Forestry and Mining Subcommittee
Oversight Hearing

OPENING STATEMENT

The Subcommittee will come to order.

The purpose of today's hearing is to examine the Bureau of Land Management's proposed rule, which it has called "Planning 2.0"

The BLM has described Planning 2.0 as a simple initiative to "increase public involvement and incorporate the most current data and technology into [its] land use planning".

While there is no doubt that the BLM's current planning process is often cumbersome and inefficient, I am concerned that instead of *increasing* public involvement and streamlining the planning process, Planning 2.0 will be less efficient, more costly, and marginalize experts who are integral to public land management.

The agency seems to think that the proposed rule is a simple clarification of the planning process, but that is not the case.

What Planning 2.0 proposes would fundamentally alter the way state, local and tribal local governments, stakeholders, and the general public engage in the public land management planning process.

As written, Planning 2.0 will effectively ignore expert knowledge in both local agency offices - and among local land users - and compromise the ability of state and local governments to represent the people and resources in their districts.

In an effort to meet its goal of a transition to "landscape-scale" planning, BLM proposes to shift authority from local and district offices to Washington.

I appreciate the BLM wants to make management plans more cohesive among local office, but developing sweeping, landscape-scale plans from the director's office in Washington will result in the failure to use invaluable, localized knowledge of ecosystems and resources.

This change would result in plans that do not reflect on-the-ground realities and ultimately, will disenfranchise knowledgeable local agency employees.

And it won't just be agency personnel who are overlooked. In the proposed rule, BLM seems to recognize the need for improved stakeholder involvement in the planning process.

Unfortunately, the proposed changes will decrease stakeholder involvement at crucial points in the planning process and will further extend plan development times that are already much too long. The BLM seems to think that the addition of the "Planning Assessment" period at the beginning of the planning process would help agency officials understand how the public feels.

What the agency clearly fails to realize, however, is that if planning is kept at the local and state offices, officials developing the plans should already be aware of public opinion before the process begins.

Formalizing this preemptive "Planning Assessment" period seems to be a justification for regional or federal agency employees to implement a top-down land management agenda.

Introduction of public comment on "Preliminary Alternatives" *before* a draft Resource Management Plan is published will only increase the time it takes to complete a resource management plan and, in my view, will provide no added benefit.

How can the public, or any relevant stakeholder, be expected to comment on proposed alternatives when the details of the plan have yet to be determined?

I do want to say that while I have significant issues with Planning 2.0 as proposed, I appreciate that the BLM seems to recognize that the current planning process could use significant improvement.