

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0301

June 15, 2018

Brian Steed
Acting Director
Bureau of Land Management
1849 C Street NW, Rm. 5665
Washington DC 20240

Dear Acting Director Steed,

I am concerned with reports I have seen indicating the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) intends to offer an oil and gas lease sale extremely close to the Petrified Forest National Park and the Little Colorado River on September 6th. Any effort by the BLM to limit public participation, or the availability of relevant information, is unacceptable. Residents, counties, tribes and stakeholder groups need ample time and information to provide input on this decision. This judgement will impact the local economy, and that needs to be a major consideration.

The proposed lease parcels in Navajo and Apache Counties are very close to the Petrified Forest National Park. The Petrified Forest is a unique geological, archeological and paleontological treasure originally set aside for protection by Theodore Roosevelt in 1906, and was most recently expanded in 2004 when George W. Bush signed legislation to extend the park. Over decades, there has always been bipartisan agreement that this park needs to be preserved for future generations as both a unique environment and as an economic driver in the region, attracting tourists from around the globe. In 2016, there were nearly 650,000 visitors to the park and surrounding communities. The cumulative economic impact of the park was \$45,858,200. This includes supporting 568 jobs in a rural area, where jobs can be scarce. Federal actions that may impact the park, or the economy that it supports, need to be fully studied and include local communities.

In addition to the concerns about the potential risk to the park, the proposed lease sites are adjacent to the Little Colorado River and the Puerco River. These streams eventually flow into the Colorado River and the Grand Canyon. As you are aware, nearly 40 million Americans receive water from the Colorado River, and activities that have the potential to impact that water supply should be fully and thoroughly analyzed. As you are also aware, the southwest is in prolonged drought and every drop of water is precious. A full NEPA study would be appropriate for any federal decision that has potential to impact the water supply of millions.

Public input is essential to the management of our public lands. I understand that under the current proposal, there will only be one ten-day comment period for the public to express their concerns with the proposed auction and lease beginning July 23rd. Such a short comment period

is wholly unacceptable. Local counties, towns, tribes, residents and stakeholders should be consulted on this decision, and have a reasonable amount of time to comment on this proposal, with access to all pertinent information like what would be provided under a NEPA process.

I urge you to halt all activity related to this sale, reconsider if the sale is necessary and, if so, conduct a complete a full NEPA process for the proposed sale with robust public participation.

Sincerely,

Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress