



December 17, 2018

Submitted via eplanning.blm.gov

Jacob Palma
Bureau of Land Management
Price Field Office
125 S 600 W
Price, Utah 84501

Re: Price Field Office March 2019 Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale

Dear Mr. Palma:

Western Energy Alliance appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) competitive oil and natural gas lease sale for parcels in the Price Field Office in March 2019. The Alliance urges BLM to proceed with leasing all the parcels considered in the Determination of National Environmental Policy Act Adequacy (DNA), although we request that BLM modify certain stipulations proposed to be attached to the parcels in Greater Sage-Grouse (GrSG) habitat.

Western Energy Alliance represents over 300 companies engaged in all aspects of environmentally responsible exploration and production of oil and natural gas in Utah and across the West. The Alliance represents independents, the majority of which are small businesses with an average of fifteen employees.

First and foremost, the Alliance is pleased that BLM is moving forward with the lease sale following an extensive public comment period. Although some interest groups have urged BLM to indefinitely delay all leasing in GrSG habitat, BLM rightly determined that "The Price RMP and ARMPA for sage grouse in 2018 analyzed the effects of leasing and developing oil and gas resources on sage grouse and other sensitive wildlife species. The applications of lease notices and stipulations have been effective in mitigating the site specific concerns at the APD stage." DNA at 33.

BLM is correct to proceed with leasing these parcels, and by deferring them from the fourth quarter 2018 sale into 2019 it has now afforded the public a full and extended period to comment on the EA. No further delay is necessary, and all parcels evaluated in the EA should be offered for sale in the first quarter. The Alliance does, however, recommend BLM provide some flexibility regarding the GrSG stipulations as it proceeds to the leasing stage.

As BLM is aware, it has proposed to amend its resource management plans (RMPs) for the GrSG in Utah. With this proposed amendment, BLM seeks to "to further enhance its continued cooperation with western states by ensuring greater consistency between

individual state plans and the BLM's multiple-use mission." See Utah Greater Sage-Grouse Proposed RMP Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement at ES-1 (2018) (PRMPA/FEIS). Although the Alliance understands that BLM intends to issue a Record of Decision (ROD) for the RMP amendment in early 2019, the ROD may not issue before the March 2019 lease sale. Most likely, the ROD will not issue before BLM posts the sale parcel list that identifies the stipulations and lease notices to be attached to each parcel (anticipated by January 24, 2019).

In the PRMPA/FEIS, BLM proposed to modify numerous oil and gas leasing stipulations set forth in the 2015 Approved RMP Amendment Record of Decision (2015 RMP Amendments), some of which BLM has proposed to attach to parcels to be offered at the March 2019 lease sale. These stipulations include no surface occupancy and controlled surface use stipulations, net conservation gain requirements, required design features, and buffers.

Because BLM has proposed to modify these stipulations, the Alliance disagrees with BLM's decision to offer parcels for lease with stipulations from the 2015 RMP Amendments that BLM has proposed to change. Oil and natural gas lessees should not be required to adhere to lease stipulations that BLM determines are not warranted or should be modified.

Although BLM has a regulatory process to modify lease stipulations, see 43 C.F.R. § 3101.1-4, this process would require a public comment period of at least 30 days, thus delaying development. Modification is unnecessary given the extensive public process that BLM is conducting to amend its RMPs. Furthermore, this process is inconsistent with Executive Order No. 13,783 (Mar. 28, 2017), which announced a "national interest" in "avoiding regulatory burdens that unnecessarily encumber energy production, constrain economic growth, and prevent job creation."

To avoid subjecting oil and natural gas lessees to out-of-date and superseded lease stipulations, the Alliance requests that BLM include a provision in the GrSG lease stipulations attached to parcels offered at the March 2019 lease sale that allows the lessee to elect to adhere to the lease stipulation set forth in the RMP (1) in effect at the time the lease sale is held, (2) in effect at the time the lease is issued, or (3) in effect at the time of development. Specifically, the Alliance requests that the GrSG lease stipulations include the following language:

In lieu of adhering to the lease stipulation set forth above, the lessee may elect to implement the applicable stipulation under the Resource Management Plan in effect either (1) at the time the lease sale is held; (2) at the time the lease is issued; or (3) at the time BLM approves an Application for Permit to Drill a well on the lease.

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Such a provision would ensure the final permit to drill is issued in accordance with the most current stipulations in the RMPs. Providing this flexibility would give lessees greater confidence that the parcels they are bidding on will not have overly burdensome restrictions attached when they could otherwise be leased with fewer stipulations at a later date, and that flexibility will therefore increase interest in these parcels.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Tripp Parks
Manager of Government Affairs