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United States Department of the Interior



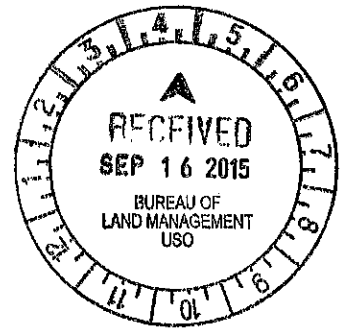
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Capitol Reef National Park
HC 70 Box 15
Torrey, Utah 84775

IN REPLY REFER TO:

File Code 1.A.1.

16 September 2015

Jenna Whitlock, Acting State Director
Bureau of Land Management
Utah State Office
440 West 200 South, Suite 500
Salt Lake City, Utah 84101



Dear Director Whitlock:

This letter informs the Bureau of Land Management that Capitol Reef National Park (Capitol Reef, or the park) is protesting the potential leasing of oil and gas parcels on land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the vicinity of Capitol Reef. The leases in question are presented in the BLM Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-UT-G021-2015-0031-EA dated August 15, 2015. The specific parcels on which our protest is focused are located between our north park boundary and Interstate Highway 70, and are parcels 086, 087, 089, 090, 091, 092, 093, 094, 095, 096, 097, 098, 100, and 101 as shown on Map 2 of the above-referenced Environmental Assessment (Price Field Office Nov 2015 Proposed O&G Sale Map 2 [sic]). Several of these proposed lease parcels are located within 5 to 6 miles of Capitol Reef's northern boundary and all of the parcels are visible from northern portions of Capitol Reef.

Capitol Reef National Park believes the parcels should be removed from leasing consideration because of the detrimental effects of oil and gas exploration and potential development on park resources. In addition, because these parcels are close to our northern boundary, we believe BLM should have contacted Capitol Reef directly regarding the environmental assessment for the proposed leases. That direct contact did not occur.

The resources with which we are concerned include those listed below at a minimum. Potential effects to these resources, individually and cumulatively, have the potential for significant negative impacts not only to these resources, but on the visitor experience in Capitol Reef.

Wilderness

The proposed leases are in close proximity to proposed wilderness in Capitol Reef. Oil and gas exploration and development has the potential to have significant negative impacts on wilderness values in Capitol Reef.

Viewshed

The current viewshed from the northern portions of Capitol Reef is undeveloped land. Visitors are unable to determine visually where the park boundary ends and BLM, or other, land begins, and the entire area

shows little evidence of human use. Oil and gas exploration and development has the potential to have significant negative impacts to our viewshed.

Soundscape

The current soundscape in northern Capitol Reef is that of natural sounds with only occasional interruption by vehicles or airplanes. The low levels of ambient sound reinforce wilderness values and visitor experience. Oil and gas exploration and development has the potential to have significant negative impacts to our soundscape.

Dark Night Sky

Capitol Reef was designated an International Dark Sky Park in 2014 and dark night skies are becoming important to more and more visitors as opportunities for observing night skies diminish in more urban areas. Oil and gas exploration and development has the potential to have significant negative impacts to our dark night skies.

Air Quality

Pristine air quality and nearly limitless views are an integral part of the visitor experience and are a necessary part of maintaining our viewshed and dark night skies. In addition, Capitol Reef is designated as a Class I Airshed by the Environmental Protection Agency. As a result, the park is very concerned about potential negative effects on air quality from oil and gas exploration and development in the region.

We appreciate BLM's receipt of our comments and consideration of withdrawal of these parcels from oil and gas leasing.

Sincerely,

Scott Brown ACTING
Leah McGinnis,
Superintendent