

# CHAMA PEAK LAND ALLIANCE

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October 1, 2012

Connie Clementson, Field Manager  
Bureau of Land Management  
Tres Rios Field Office,  
29211 Hwy. 184  
Dolores, CO 81323  
Attn: Oil and Gas Lease Sale

Helen Hankins, State Director  
Bureau of Land Management  
Colorado State Office  
2850 Youngfield Street  
Lakewood, CO 80215

**Re: DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2012-0061  
Comments on Behalf of the Chama Peak Land Alliance Regarding Tres Rios  
February 2013 Oil and Gas Lease Sale**

Dear Ms. Clementson and Ms. Hankins:

The Chama Peak Land Alliance (“CPLA”) is an association of conservation-minded landowners working collaboratively to practice and promote ecologically and economically sound land management in the southern San Juan Mountains of Colorado and northern New Mexico. Members of the Alliance represent a land area that ranges from 7,000 feet to over 12,000 feet including portions of the Continental Divide covering approximately 200,000 acres (see map on page 5).

Our landowners, the conservation achievements in the Navajo River Valley to date, and our ongoing work, will be directly impacted by the development of proposed leases 6401 and 6402.

As such, it is important to the Alliance, and the Navajo River Valley landowners, that there be adequate economic and environmental analysis and meaningful community engagement *before* the BLM proceeds with the February 2013 oil and gas lease sale. The opportunity for public comment has been compromised by BLM's lack of general noticing of the release of the Environmental Assessment, the proposed actions, and an associated "public" meeting. And, the current lease sale is based on a 27 year-old analysis that is expected to be revised and complete later this year.

Given these circumstances, we request that the BLM not proceed with the proposed lease sale until additional analysis and community participation is gathered and a final land management plan is finalized.

Below, we have detailed some issues for your consideration in regards to oil and gas leasing in the northern San Juan Basin as well as specific issues regarding lease parcels 6401 and 6402:

Lease parcels 6401 and 6402 are located in the heart of the Navajo River Valley. This valley is the focus of a major conservation effort on the part of landowners, organizations and government agencies. Federal, state and local governments have provided substantial funding and public support. The area has been identified by the states of Colorado and New Mexico, the U.S. Congress through the federal Forest Legacy program, and the Western Governors' Association as a high priority for conservation. The present Environmental Assessment (EA) does not contemplate any of these efforts.

Because conservation and community health must be considered at a landscape scale, we find it critically important that stakeholders collaborate across boundaries on actions with the potential for significant consequences. One of the most important opportunities for this type of collaborative, landscape-scale planning takes place during the development of the federal land management plans. However, the present San Juan Public Lands Management Plan is currently more than 20 years out of date and was drafted long before any of the current conservation efforts in the Navajo River Valley. It also was written prior to the now widespread use of new methods and technologies in the oil and gas industry, including fracking.

In 2008, the BLM proposed leasing parcels in essentially the same location but eventually deferred those leases until the final draft of the new San Juan Public Lands Management Plan was released. We applauded the BLM's willingness to reconsider and to evaluate those parcels within the broader landscape context. However, it is our understanding that the plan is not yet complete. We are concerned that the BLM is considering lease offerings prior to the completion of the new plan. With the old plan outdated and no longer relevant and the new plan as yet incomplete, we cannot evaluate the likely scope or impacts of potential development to our community. Is the BLM contemplating widespread leasing in this area? What might be the cumulative effects on our valley? We strongly encourage you to defer any leases until the plan is finalized.

In addition, we request the BLM consider the following:

1. The EA states there are no agricultural lands present in the vicinity of the proposed leases (p.20). In fact, the leases are completely surrounded by actively managed agricultural lands. We request the BLM include an assessment of any potential impacts to agricultural operations, land and water at each phase of exploration, drilling and production. Agricultural producers in the area are particularly concerned with the question of whether fracking poses a risk to their water supply, including natural springs, wells and irrigation sources.

2. The EA does not consider the conservation easements and explicitly protected scenic, wildlife, conservation, and agricultural values on surrounding and nearby parcels. We request that the BLM evaluate both surface and subsurface values in a landscape-scale context to determine the most suitable locations for well pads and related production activities. Given the extent of BLM minerals in the area, there may be opportunities to reduce impacts to parcels under conservation easement by placing well pads in other locations. In this particular lease sale, for instance, the BLM proposes to lease the subsurface of a very narrow strip of property which is under a conservation easement. Given the possibility of horizontal drilling, are there other more appropriate locations for such a well? Has the BLM considered this question in its current leasing plan?

3. The EA states there are no Colorado River Cutthroat trout in the Navajo River system (p. 48). To the contrary, the upper Navajo River is the site of several intensive conservation and restoration efforts for genetically pure Colorado River Cutthroat trout populations. Both Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are involved in these efforts in partnership with private landowners. There are additional efforts downstream to restore other species of native fish as well. We request the BLM review the current status of native fish restoration projects underway in the Navajo River. We understand the NRCS also has plans to do a river restoration in this stretch of river. Will the proposed lease have any impacts on these projects or aquatic wildlife?

4. Both lease parcels are in very close proximity to the Navajo River and the water table is very close to the surface. Spills or contamination of the surface or subsurface waters are of great concern as these waters support domestic wells, springs, livestock ponds, recreation and wildlife. Contamination as a result of fracking is possible through active and abandoned wells (water, oil and gas), of which there are many in the nearby vicinity. We request the BLM address the potential risks to water resources. Area residents who depend on this water also wish to know what contingency plans are in place should such contamination occur, either through fracking or accidental spills. We also request that prior to any oil and gas development, baseline data be collected on water resources, including domestic wells, and that such information be made available to residents.

5. The EA concludes that the only socio-economic impacts from the development would be increased employment, personal income and tax revenue (p. 20). In fact, two of the most significant economic drivers in our community are tourism (including eco-tourism, hunting and fishing) and second homes, both of which are likely to be impacted by oil and gas development. Agriculture plays a major economic and cultural role in the Chromo valley as well. Local ranches are largely dependent on hunting revenues to remain in agriculture.

Many homeowners in our area are retirees who have moved here specifically for the wildlife, scenery and quality of life. Oil and gas development may have a negative impact on those values, which, in turn, could drive away existing and potential homeowners along with the service jobs they support. While those landowners who own mineral rights may see an increase in personal income as a result of oil and gas development, some landowners could see a decrease in property

value. We request the BLM provide a more thorough and comprehensive assessment of the potential economic impacts.

6. The possibility of increased traffic, road impacts, noise, dust, air pollution and lights is of great concern to our members. Also of great interest to our members is the impact of these disturbances to elk and mule deer seasonal migrations. We request the BLM consider these impacts in the EA rather than deferring them for consideration following the lease sale. We also request that the potential cumulative impacts be considered to the extent the BLM anticipates continued development of the federal leases in the valley. If every BLM lease must be considered individually and without the consideration of a full development, then at no time will there be the opportunity to address the real, cumulative impacts or to factor those potential impacts into a decision-making process.

For the past two years, the Chama Peak Land Alliance and area landowners, many of whom control their private mineral rights, have been working proactively to help guide potential oil and gas development. As part of the project, we have initiated work on an Area Best Management Practices plan. This plan seeks to protect important values on the landscape, identify the most suitable locations for well pads and other infrastructure, and to encourage up to date best management practices at every stage of any oil and gas development. Because private and federal minerals are adjoining in the Chromo valley and the development of either or both will have significant impacts, we request the BLM collaborate with us on the development and implementation of this Area Best Management Practices plan.

If you are available for an in-person meeting, please contact Lesli Allison, Alliance Representative, at 970-759-5741 or [lallison30@gmail.com](mailto:lallison30@gmail.com).

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Richard Gooding, Chair

Jeb Binkley, Vice-Chair

**On behalf of the Chama Peak Land Alliance Board of Directors**

c.c: Wanda Cason, Senator Mark Udall's Office  
John Whitney, Senator Michael Bennet's Office  
Archuleta County Commissioners

