

Montana Petroleum Association

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HEARD IT THROUGH THE PIPELINE

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MALTA BLM MEETING NOTES

I attended a meeting last evening in Malta, Montana with BLM Director Abbey and the new Montana BLM Director Jamie Connell. The event was requested by the Phillips County Commissioners who asked that Mr. Abbey come to Malta to explain the “Treasured Lands” document, or what is commonly being referred to as the “leaked memo”. The meeting was held in the Phillips High School gym, and it was standing room only.

Quite a few things struck me yesterday, the first being the level of enthusiasm that was evident throughout the town. Nearly every house in Malta had one of two signs in their yards. Both signs were green and reflected opposition to a new national monument in Phillips County. These signs were everywhere. There was also about 300 people who were carrying signs asking, “Where’s Max” (referring to US Senator Max Baucus). I have attached some photos of the various signs that covered the highway entering Malta. Nearly every business had a sign in their window as well.

The Phillips County Superintendent of Schools was concerned about the event and was hoping the gym was large enough to hold the expected crowd. He explained that the way the gym was set up, it would seat about 2,200 people.

Fidelity E&P and Bitter Creek Pipeline employees had a barbeque trailer at the event offering a hamburger or sloppy joe dinner for the crowd. All they asked for was a free will offering to be donated to the local opposition effort. They started setting up around noon and were still there cleaning at 9 PM. It was a long day for our industry friends who worked hard for a grateful community.

The meeting started at 7:00 PM. There were over 2000 people in attendance, and nearly everyone had a green ribbon and/or shirt opposing the monument. BLM Director Abbey spoke for about 20 minutes. He was very clear that there were no plans in his agency to create a monument in Montana. Abbey took ownership of the Treasured Lands document and repeated that there were no ongoing efforts to implement the monument plans outlined in the document.

Former State Legislator, Ron Devlin moderated the event. After Abbey’s comments, he selected 20 people from a sign up list to offer comments. Commenter’s were limited to three minutes. One person spoke in favor of the monument and she is an employee of the Wilderness Society from Livingston (admittedly she was a brave soul).

The remainder of the comments came from the local and surrounding area. A Farm Bureau Representative and MPA were the only trade association representatives allowed to offer comment. Comments were concise, respectful, and voiced firm opposition. Local business leaders, citizens, farmers and ranchers came from all over eastern Montana came to listen and participate. About 50 people drove 230 miles from Terry in a school bus to present comments.

Director Abbey closed the meeting with several comments. He did say that he didn't care if people believed him or not, but that he spoke the truth...there were no plans for a monument designation.

MPA has drafted and delivered comments regarding the Treasured Lands document. Those comments are attached, along with a few snap shots of the signs in the area. In addition, MPA is working to introduce a resolution in the 2011 legislative session on federal land use policies. MPA has led the formation of a trade association coalition that includes the Montana Coal Council, Montana Stockgrowers Association, Montana Wood Products Association, Montana Farm Bureau, Montana Mining Association, Montana Rural Education Association and the MPA.

We will continue to be engaged in Federal land use issues. Please take a few minutes and review the attached material.

Newspaper Articles:

[BLM head reassures big crowd in Malta](#) – Great Falls Tribune, 9-17-10

[No monuments, Malta crowd tells BLM's leader](#) – Billings Gazette, 9-17-10