



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Montana State Office

5001 Southgate Drive

Billings, Montana 59101-4669

<http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en.html>

In Reply To:

3100 (922.JB)

February 9, 2007

Mr. Larry G. Peterman
Chief of Field Operations
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks
P.O. Box 200701
Helena Montana 59620-0701

Dear Mr. Peterman:

We thank you for the information provided by your agency in a letter dated January 15, 2007, and in your earlier letter of November 14, 2006. We appreciate your agency's interest in working with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to better enhance wildlife habitat on BLM-administered Federal lands. The BLM has reviewed your specific concerns relative to the parcels on our November 28, 2006 and January 30, 2007 Competitive Oil and Gas Sale Lists. We have addressed the concerns you raised in your letters on a parcel-by-parcel basis for both sales. We have added specific additional stipulations to the affected parcels following coordination between our Field Offices (FOs) and T.O. Smith. Via this letter, we hope to address the questions concerning the exchange of wildlife data raised in your letters.

You note that the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) has experienced biologists located throughout the state that provide on-the-ground localized management based on a complete understanding of the needs of the local fish and wildlife resources. The BLM encourages our FO biologists to engage in ongoing coordination with FWP to ensure that they have the most up-to-date information on local wildlife resources, not only as it relates to energy development, but also to all of the BLM's other programs. We appreciate active coordination by FWP biologists with their counterparts in BLM offices and encourage the FWP to participate in our land use planning efforts. We also encourage you to continue to coordinate with our FOs after plans are completed in order to share new inventory data and ensure that our local BLM offices have the most up-to-date information. In order to facilitate this coordination and exchange of wildlife data, we have enclosed a map showing our office boundaries and a contact list (Enclosures 1 and 2). The individuals listed on Enclosure 2 are those people who directly supervise the biologists in our FOs. The individuals included on the contact list may be contacted at the numbers listed on the boundary map (Enclosure 1). We have also enclosed a copy of the latest map showing ongoing and future land use planning boundaries in Montana (Enclosure 3). Using this map and Enclosure 1 will allow you to contact the local office project leads as they are selected for future and ongoing land use plans.

In regard to your request for the list of proposed parcels in digital format, we are sorry that we will not be able to honor your request since at this time we do not have that capability. The Bureau is diligently working towards implementing a Bureauwide uniform Lease Sale System that will provide that capability. However, we will continue to send you our sale notice as you request.

We appreciate receiving your wildlife information for us to consider if additional wildlife lease stipulations are necessary for some of the parcels in our two recent sales. However, we would like to receive your input earlier in the process as described below and not right before our lease sale. In the BLM, oil and gas leasing is a lengthy process beginning with the preparation of the Resource Management Plan (RMP) for a BLM planning area. During development of an RMP, oil and gas lease stipulations and site-specific mitigation measures are developed and analyzed that will be applied in the future for new leases. During this process, there are extensive opportunities for public involvement including state and local agencies. At the completion of the planning process, a Record of Decision is issued and the plan is adopted. This plan is kept up-to-date by constant plan maintenance and amendments as needed. This maintenance allows the BLM to ensure our decisions continue to be appropriate and valid.

The next step begins when the agency receives a request to offer lands for lease in our office. We request leasing recommendations from our FOs or the surface management agency (SMA) if the lands are administered by another Federal agency. If the FO or SMA recommends leasing, we are provided with lease stipulations and notices and documentation of conformance with the land use plan and NEPA adequacy (DNA) for each of the parcels. The DNA is an integral part of our decision record for leasing the parcel. The stipulations provided are based on the RMP and any new or updated information that has become available since the RMP was completed. This new or updated information would include any information provided by your agency. This is why it is critical that we have your most up-to-date data on a continuing basis. At the point that we receive leasing recommendations with appropriate stipulations from our FOs, we prepare the final sale list and post it for 45 days before the scheduled lease sale date. Our goal is that with your updated data, your agency would not need to perform a review during the posting period. Also, since lease stipulations were added to some of the parcels per your input, we are required by regulation to post the additional stipulations for 45 days before lease issuance.

We believe that the most effective and efficient approach to ensure that your concerns are addressed in our process is for us to receive inventory data from the FWP early in our process to ensure consideration by our FOs during their review of leasing requests. In addition, your data is critical to the BLM for all our other activities that the BLM manages. Therefore, we would like to request your agency provide wildlife inventory data that you might have to our FOs on a continuing basis in whatever format you are able to do so. This will enable the BLM to ensure that our plans are maintained for all BLM land use activities.

You also ask about securing our stipulations in a digital format. At this time the stipulations for our Dillon FO are fully digitized as that was our first completed RMP that fully utilized GIS capabilities. Stipulations for our other FOs are not digitized. However, as these plans are updated, the full capabilities of GIS will be used. For leasing in the Lewistown, Malta and Butte RMP areas, we apply a standard stipulation and notice package that includes protective measures for wildlife resources (Enclosure 4) and a threatened and endangered species stipulation on every lease (Enclosure 5). We will arrange to have the GIS coverages used by the Dillon FO for oil and gas lease stipulations provided to your agency. When we finish digitizing the Miles City FO stipulations, we will also forward those coverages. If you have any questions, please contact John Bown at (406) 896-5109.

On the broader issue concerning updating statewide crucial winter range coverage in Montana, we would suggest you contact Gayle Sitter who is the wildlife biologist in this office at (406) 896-5024 to arrange for a transfer of the data between your information management staff and our GIS staff. Any other wildlife inventory data, including grouse lek data that can be provided would also be appreciated.

We hope this letter helps clarify your concerns. However, we still would like to meet with you in Billings to further discuss our leasing process and how best to coordinate the exchange of wildlife data. Please contact Chun Wong, Fluids Branch Chief, at (406) 896-5099 to arrange a meeting time.

Sincerely,

/s/ Theresa M. Hanley

Theresa M. Hanley
Deputy State Director
Division of Resources

6 Enclosures:

- 1-Field Office Locations and Boundaries (1 p)
- 2-Contact List (1 p)
- 3-Land Use Planning Boundary Map (1 p)
- 4-Standard Stipulation and Notice Package (2 p)
- 5-TES Stipulation (1 p)
- 6-Existing Planning Map (1 p)

cc: (w/encl.)

Mr. T.O. Smith, Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife, Conservation and Energy
Coordinator, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks, P.O. Box 200701, Helena, MT
59620-0701

cc: (w/o encl.)

Billings FO
Butte FO
Dillon FO
Lewistown FO
Malta FO
Miles City FO
Missoula FO
Havre FS
Glasgow FS
Gayle Sitter (MT 923)

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