

Navajo Nation Council Delegate Daniel Tso • New Mexico State Senator Antoinette Sedillo Lopez  
Counselor Chapter House • Dine C.A.R.E • Dooda (No) Desert Rock • Honor the Earth • Pueblo Action Alliance •  
Southwest Native Cultures • Tewa Women United

350 New Mexico • Center for Biological Diversity • Chaco Alliance • Earthcare • Earthworks  
Food and Water Watch • For the Greater Good • Frack Free Four Corners • Frack Free New Mexico Frack Off Chaco •  
Great Old Broads for Wilderness • Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment  
PNM Shareholders for a Responsible Future • Public Citizen • New Energy Economy  
NM Environmental Public Health Network • New Mexico MoveOn • Rio Arriba Concerned Citizens  
Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club • SEED • Vitale Therapeutics • We Are One River  
WildEarth Guardians

**BY ELECTRONIC MAIL**

March 30, 2020

Tim Spisak  
New Mexico State Office Director  
U.S. Bureau of Land Management  
301 Dinosaur Trail  
Santa Fe, NM 87501

**Re: Requesting BLM New Mexico Take Action to Respond to COVID-19 Crisis, Join New Mexicans in Making Response a Priority**

Dear Mr. Spisak:

In light of the COVID-19 crisis that is now upon the United States and New Mexico, the undersigned urge you to direct the New Mexico State Office of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (“BLM”) and all Field and District Offices within the State to immediately suspend all open public comment periods, planning processes, and policy development. We urge that you take this action so that we can focus on protecting the health and well-being of our society, instead of a myopic focus on the health of the oil and gas industry.

In response to the pandemic, on March 13 the Trump Administration declared a ‘national health emergency;’ on March 20 the National Governors Association and other groups representing state and local officials called for the suspension of all non-corona related federal rulemaking and non-rulemaking proceedings; and on March 24 New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham issued a stay-at-home order, ordering all non-essential businesses to close. Yet, instead of supporting a pandemic response, right now the BLM is carelessly continuing with business-as-usual, proposing to undertake numerous actions with major implications for public lands and resources in New Mexico, without the ability for meaningful public engagement.

The BLM has already taken extraordinary steps to minimize public participation in oil and gas decisions by reducing protest periods from 30 to 10 days, an inordinately short amount of time to meaningfully engage. As the world turns to manage an unexpected crisis, the BLM should not be leveraging the public quarantine to sacrifice more of our public lands, health and safety, and air and water resources to the oil and gas industry.

The public health crisis has already impacted normal working and living conditions and is impairing the ability of not only state, local, and tribal officials, but also the general public, issue experts, and others to provide thoughtful and meaningful participation and involvement in potential BLM actions that directly affect millions of people. Furthermore, low-wealth communities and communities of color, including Indigenous communities, are being disproportionately harmed by this emergency, and these communities are also on the frontlines of oil and gas extraction in New Mexico. In the midst of the public health and economic emergency caused by the COVID-19 crisis, we urge you to protect the most vulnerable New Mexicans from the dangers and insecurity that result from the public health crisis, not take advantage of our inability to engage in BLM decision making.

The BLM should halt its consideration of new actions regarding the disposition of public lands and resources under its management authority. At a minimum, this must include the suspension of consideration of new public land and resource management actions, public comment periods for new projects, ongoing resource management planning processes, and the development of new policy. These actions and activities include, but are not limited to:

- **Leasing federal oil and gas reserves.** The BLM is currently seeking public comment on a proposal to sell oil and gas leases in southeast New Mexico. The agency must suspend this proposed lease sale, as well as future lease sales, in light of the current health crisis.
- **Oil and gas drilling permits.** Currently, the BLM is reviewing and seeking public comment on a number of proposals to approve applications for permits to drill in both northwest and southeast New Mexico.
- **Farmington Resource Management Plan Amendment and Carlsbad Resource Management Plan Revision.** The BLM is currently accepting public comment on an amendment to the Farmington Field Office Resource Management Plan and has indicated it intends to hold public hearings on the proposal. In light of the COVID-19 crisis, there is no chance the BLM will hold public hearings in the near future. This, coupled with the burden the crisis poses on the public, bolsters the need for a suspension of the public comment period, as requested by the New Mexico Congressional Delegation on March 20. Additionally, the BLM is reviewing a draft Resource Management Plan Revision for the Carlsbad Field Office. It behooves the agency to pause the development of new plans while New Mexico and the United States weather the current health crisis.

The authority for the BLM to suspend these and other new management actions is inherent under the agency's laws and regulations. All of the aforementioned actions and activities are discretionary acts that the agency is not required to undertake. In light of the COVID-19 emergency, there is no need for the BLM to keep burdening the already-burdened public.

We are not suggesting the BLM's New Mexico State Office shut down. Rather, we're calling on the agency to focus on actions that maintain the health and integrity of public lands and resources so that we can all collectively rise to the challenge of confronting COVID-19. To this end, any management actions documented as absolutely necessary to protect life, safety, or irreversible environmental damage should proceed.

We urge you to join us in making the response to the COVID-19 crisis the highest priority for this nation. Now is the time to protect communities, not exploit them.

Sincerely,



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**New Mexico State Senator Antoinette Sedillo Lopez**

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**SEED**

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**Vitale Therapeutics**

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**We Are One River**

Mark LeClaire, Organizer

CC: Senator Tom Udall, Senator Martin Heinrich, Congressman Ben Ray Lujan, Congresswoman  
Deb Haaland, Congresswomen Xochitl Torres-Small, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham