



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Washington, D.C. 20240
<http://www.blm.gov>



AUG 22 2016

CERTIFIED MAIL – RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

Ms. Sara Taylor
Executive Director, Citizen's Advisory
Commission on Federal Areas
State of Alaska
101 Airport Road
Palmer, Alaska 99645

Dear Ms. Taylor:

Thank you for your letter of August 4, 2016, requesting an extension of the protest period for the Proposed Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Eastern Interior planning area in east-central Alaska. Director Kornze asked me to respond. We share your strong interest in making sure that affected Alaskans and all those interested in this unique and special area have a full and fair opportunity to express their views on this plan, and want to work with you to this end.

While we are not able under our regulations to extend the protest period, we will make every effort to accommodate the concerns you express. As you may know, the protest process is not a general comment period, but has very specific requirements for who can participate, the issues raised, and timing. Our regulations require that all protests must be filed within 30 days of the date that the Environmental Protection Agency published the notice of receipt of the final environmental impact statement containing the plan in the *Federal Register*.¹ In the case of the Eastern Interior proposed RMP and Final EIS, the 30-day protest period began on July 29, 2016, and ends on August 29, 2016.

Nevertheless, we would welcome any additional information that groups or individuals would like to provide about the proposed RMP and Final EIS. We should be able to consider any information received in a timely manner before we issue the Record of Decision. In addition to the protest period, the Governor's 60-day consistency review period is also underway and will end September 28, 2016. During this period the public may submit additional information by any of the following methods:

- Email: easterninterior@blm.gov
- Fax: 907-474-2282
- Mail: Eastern Interior Field Office, Attention—Eastern Interior Proposed RMP/Final EIS, Bureau of Land Management, 222 University Ave., Fairbanks, Alaska 99709

¹ See 43 CFR §1610.5-2, and H-1601-1, *BLM Land Use Planning Handbook*, III (A) (11) (March 11, 2015).

The Director and I share your concerns about the challenges Alaskans face during the busy summer months to make their livelihoods and provide for their families. We understand the challenge of balancing these necessities with the time it takes to provide meaningful input on proposed management plans for the public lands that they and all Americans cherish.

With these realities in mind, the BLM offered 405 days of comment period for the draft RMP/EIS and the Supplemental EIS for the Eastern Interior planning area, between March 2, 2012, and April 11, 2013. We held 20 public meetings in various communities in the planning area including: Anchorage, Fairbanks, Birch Creek, Central, Circle, Chalkyitsik, Chicken, Delta Junction, Eagle, Eagle Village, Fort Yukon, and Tok. We met with the Alaska Miners Association (both Fairbanks and Anchorage chapters) and the Fortymile Mining District. We gave a presentation on the Draft RMP at the Alaska Miners Association Conference in Fairbanks. We provided an additional 60 days for comment between January 2, 2015, and March 3, 2015, with the notice of additional information on the proposed Fortymile and Mosquito Flats Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.

In addition to publishing opportunities for comment in the *Federal Register*, we made available copies of the proposed plan to cooperating agencies, State, and Congressional representatives; mailed CDs and hard copies by request and made them available to the public in our offices; sent emails, faxes, postcard notifications, and press releases; and posted electronic copies of the plan on our website. Cooperating agencies, including the State of Alaska, had two opportunities to review and provide input to the preliminary Proposed RMP before we released it to the public.

As a result of more than 15 months of public comment periods, we received 590 comments, including those from the Chalkyitsik Village Council, Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich'in Tribal Government, the State of Alaska, miners from the Fortymile area, and industry groups. Of the total comments, 171 submissions were from rural Alaska residents who qualify as Federal subsistence users. All of these individuals and groups provided important information about their current and anticipated future uses of the lands in the planning area.

We are committed to working with you and other stakeholder groups to ensure Alaskans and all Americans have ample opportunity to comment on the land use plans that affect their public lands. You may contact Ms. Leah Baker, Division Chief, Decision Support, NEPA and Planning, BLM Washington Office, at (202) 912-7282 with any further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristin Bail", enclosed in a large, hand-drawn right-facing curly bracket.

Kristin Bail
Assistant Director
Resources and Planning