

MAKE YOUR COMMENTS COUNT!

Public comments are an essential part of the program development process. As a result of public comments, however, there often are several hundred letters, calls, and comments to review. Here are some suggestions of how to make your comments stand out and get full consideration.

- **Be brief.** More of your comments will be recorded as you've written or spoken them if there are not a lot of extra words between important statements. Reviewers are better able to respond to your concerns if they are will organized and briefly stated.
- **Be specific.** Make it clear what you want. It is more effective to say "change the proposed scoring criteria question in section 3, number 5 to say..." than to say "I don't like the questions in the scoring criteria." A specific request also forces a direct response to your proposal and is therefore more likely to produce results.
- **Explain your request.** Giving support for your opinions increases the likelihood to having some or all of your concerns met. For example instead of saying, "The number of guides in concession 121 is too low." it is more effective to say "The number of guides in concession 121 is too low because 1) there is a large population of big game in the area therefore it can support three guides operating in the area 2) concession 121 has a very large amount of state and BLM land to help disperse the hunting pressure."
- **Make it easy** for the reviewer. Give the reviewer the information needed to understand your comment. Include dates and locations if they are relevant. If you are referring to a written document, include the page and paragraph your comments refer to so the reviewer can locate it quickly and accurately.
- **Know your subject.** If you are commenting on part of a document, make sure you have read that part of the document so that your comments are relevant and accurate.
- **Use your own words.** If numerous letters come in with the same text, it is easy to pass them off as copies of a standard letter rather than considering each message individually. A letter in your words also shows more effort and thought, so it appears to the reviewer that you have a greater level of concern about the issue.
- **Be honest and realistic.** Distortions of facts or intentional misstatements are easily dismissed and may cause the reviewer to question the accuracy of your other statements. Requests that are not legal or feasible also reduce the credibility of your comments.
- **Be pleasant.** Reviewers are human too. If a statement begins with a positive comment or a not or some action you can support, it makes the reviewer want to listen.
- **Numbers count.** Letters and comments aren't tallied as votes, but a lot of comments supporting a point of view do get more attention than a single comment. If you agree with a speaker at a public meeting, speak up, even if it is

just to say, “I agree with the previous speaker.” If you write, encourage others to write as well.

- **Write legibly or type.** Your comment won't be effective if it can't be read.
- **Make personal contact.** If the reviewer can identify a face with a comment, he/she is more likely to remember it. The reviewer also may be more likely to keep in contact with the commenter, for example, if a point needs clarification.
- **Participate!** Above all, your concerns will only be known if you speak up at meetings or write or call the staff. Letters or a written copy of oral testimony are often the best way to ensure that there is a written record of your comment and that your ideas are recorded exactly as you intended them. However, a big turnout at a public meeting will make the staff and others present aware of the strength of public sentiment. In addition, higher-level decision makers often attend meetings, so it is a good way to tell them your concerns directly. Finally, the press often covers public meetings, so your views may get additional publicity.

For more information, please contact:

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