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June 29, 2018

Governor Matthew Mead  
Idelman Mansion  
2323 Carey Ave.  
Cheyenne, WY 82002-0010

Dear Governor Mead,

I write to ask that you work with the Office of State Lands and Investments (OSLI) and the other members of the State Lands Board to withdraw some 34 stranded state land parcels in the Northern Red Desert that will be auctioned for oil and gas lease sale between July 11-17, 2018.

For decades, Wyoming people have sought to balance oil and development in the Northern Red Desert by identifying discreet places that should be off-limits to that use. The State of Wyoming supported many of these protections during the BLM's past management plan revision. Today, however, the state is proposing to auction for oil and gas development stranded state land parcels in the very same landscape.

Please see the enclosed narrative, photos and maps of the incredible places the state's upcoming lease sale threatens. These places include the Boars Tusk, the Oregon/California/Mormon National Historic Trail, the scenic South Pass historic landscape, several wilderness study areas, the Greater Sand Dunes area of critical environmental concern, Steamboat Mountain, areas in the Jack Morrow Hills where the BLM is "phasing-out" oil and gas development, and crucial habitat for a rare desert elk herd and other wildlife.

The leasing of these stranded state land parcels for oil and gas development is a scenario for future management conflicts. This is because some of these areas are so fragile, pristine or so easily disrupted, that a single well could significantly erode the integrity of the landscape or resource. Many of the state land parcels have no road or pipeline access—creating threats of future impacts where none exist today. The BLM has already imposed significant prohibitions on leasing, surface disturbance and rights of way and included visual resource and other protections on surrounding lands in order to prioritize scenic, historic, cultural and wildlife values. Successful bidders would encounter access and regulatory hurdles in addition to public scrutiny and controversy should they seek to develop. Although the OS LI website notifies successful bidders that there is no guarantee of access to parcels, we believe this is an insufficient backstop to curtail controversial development proposals after lands are leased.

Further, these lease sales would undermine decades-old decisions the public has supported that seek to protect these national treasures. Key constituencies, including sportsmen, the Shoshone and Arapaho tribes, historic preservation interests, members of the Mormon church, backcountry and recreational users of all stripes, tourism entities, conservation groups and the general public—all of whom have an interest in protecting the values in the Northern Red Desert—are likely unaware of what is at stake with the advent of this state lease sale.

And perhaps the most pertinent reason to withdraw these parcels, given the OS LI's constitutional mandate to generate the most revenue from state trust lands to benefit schools—a mandate we understand and support—is the fact that this lease sale is not a fiscally responsible decision. We believe the state has another option for these parcels that will ultimately be more lucrative than oil and gas leasing.

For two years the Legislature's Joint Agriculture, State and Public Lands and Water Resources Committee has been studying the opportunity for the state to exchange its stranded parcels for more accessible BLM lands elsewhere, where development makes sense. The OS LI has provided data to the committee showing more than 100,000 acres of stranded state land parcels. In fact, earlier this month the OS LI shared with the committee detailed lists and maps of these parcels, which include many of the same parcels that we now see up for sale in the Northern Red Desert.

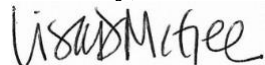
A comprehensive list of these stranded parcels can be found on the Committee's materials docket at:

<https://www.wyoleg.gov/InterimCommittee/2018/05-20180613StrandedStateLands.pdf>

At its last meeting, the committee voted to draft a resolution for the upcoming legislative session that would task our delegation to pursue, as many other western states have done, an exchange via federal legislation. We believe the state will have far greater economic development opportunities with a coordinated land exchange involving these Northern Red Desert parcels (and others). Leasing these parcels now forecloses this future option.

We ask the state to withdraw its offering of these parcels in order to commit fully to discussions already underway that address stranded parcels that fall within the Northern Red Desert and other protected public lands. Please pursue a course that gives Wyoming its best chance for a diversified and balanced economy that can benefit our state budget while protecting the places and values that we as a people hold dear. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Lisa McGee

CC: Bridget Hill, OS LI Director

Enclosures: Narrative and photos of key Northern Red Desert state land parcels