

**Testimony of Chuck McAfee  
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**Before the United States House of Representatives, Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**

**Hearing on BLM's Draft Planning 2.0 Rule  
July 7, 2016**

Mr. Chairman and members of this subcommittee, I appreciate this opportunity to share my thoughts with you on the topic of BLM planning processes.

My grandparents and their one-year-old son, my father, in-migrated to Montezuma County in Southwest Colorado a hundred years ago. They came west because their Nebraska farm dried up. In the midst of the drought that we are currently experiencing, I'm not so sure that they would not reverse the trek if they were here now.

My grandma, my granddad, and his sisters homesteaded land in Montezuma County where he began farming by hand-grubbing out the sagebrush to plant and to harvest crops. They lived in a tent on the land for a couple of years, through two winters. They hauled water for themselves and for neighbors. They were tough, hard workers. Dry-land Pinto beans and wheat were the crops of the day and they remain important crops now.

My perspective here is that of a long-time resident, third-generation on the McAfee farm land. BLM is a neighbor. We are governed locally by an elected board of county commissioners.

I presume that you know more than I do about BLM's Planning 2.0 and I don't intend to address too many details. My comments come to you from what I observe, what I know to be true. In this context I'll address two topics with you today.

First, I'll talk about public participation in the planning process, including my observations about how that has been going in our county and how it can be improved.

Second, I'll address the issue of planning around natural landscape versus political boundaries.

So, public participation in the planning process: I am completely supportive of enabling as much public involvement as possible, as early as possible, in planning for public lands. I'm local and I'm concerned. I'm thoughtful. I do my homework. I take the long view. I'm a life member of the local chapter of the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union (probably the oldest member). Our Farmers Union chapter is comprised of local family farmers, all ages, dryland farmers, farmers under the ditch, small scale, large scale, sheep growers, cattle men and women—we represent a diversity of agricultural interests in Montezuma and Dolores Counties. We understand the relationships among public lands and agricultural lands. As you can see in the submission from some of other local farmers, we are both affected by decisions on public lands and care deeply about them as part of our community.

We want our voices to be listened to and heard. What we think and what we say can be extremely valuable in gaining a broad view of local experience, long experience, interests, ideas, and needs relating to planning and implementation of plans for public lands. How public lands are managed

is vitally important to ag people as well to everyone else in a place such as ours where public lands are so prevalent as they are in Montezuma County.

I fail to understand why some county commissioners are so opposed to enabling greater public participation. Under Planning 2.0 they will not give up participation, their voices and authority will not be diminished by public voices. The whole process will be made richer by inclusion of public voices, early on. The local elected entities can view this as an opportunity to be proactive and inclusive, rather than taking a position that their roles are being undermined. They, of course, are elected to represent us. Yet that does not translate to us giving up the right and responsibility of representing ourselves. We have individual and collective perspective and ideas that go far beyond the capacity of elected officials to have the whole picture.

And sometimes our elected officials are too busy jockeying with the BLM about who is in control of our federal lands to even represent us at all. The words “*coordinating*” and “*cooperating*” are on the table much of the time in these exchanges, while we wish the two parties would get on with actually *collaborating* for the good of our community.

Recently, BLM started a process to discuss whether a master leasing plan would be helpful. Our current Resource Management Plan doesn’t really get into the details of how and when oil and gas leasing happens or development happens, even though we’ve had a lot of conflict around that. Instead of engaging in the discussion, our county commissioners spent a long time refusing to even come to the table – questioning BLM’s motives and authority. Meanwhile, many in our community wanted to have this discussion, and wished our commissioners would stop obstructing it.

BLM can and should take the lead in getting through the rhetoric and getting on with dealing effectively with issues through thoughtful, transparent collaboration. I know from personal experience that it can work to great advantage and the public will support such efforts.

Public voices along with input from officials can be very complementary and valuable if we will let it happen. Giving the public more input will only make it better.

A tag line on the House Committee on Natural Resources web page says “Empowering People Through Our Nation’s Resources”. What better way to empower people than to listen to and to hear their voices, their thoughts, as plans are developed? It’s about participation and transparency.

I also wanted to comment on planning around natural landscape versus political boundaries: In my view, this is so simple. The natural landscape and natural resources got here first. Political boundaries came later, and generally were not established with natural boundaries in mind. People and agencies charged with the responsibility of managing natural resources and landscapes need to have the latitude, and to be held accountable, for planning for the whole picture, the natural picture. In this way the interests of local farmers and ranchers and others who depend on these natural resources will be taken seriously.

A very real example of this is watersheds. Why not make watersheds be a definer for management units? The reality of watershed health and water management is a key element to economies and land use in the arid American West. It makes so much sense to assess, analyze, organize, plan and manage around natural watersheds rather than dealing with these realities being confined by political boundaries. It makes no sense for a watershed management plan to be different on one side of a political boundary from what it is on the other side. No sense. It’s just natural to be in concert with nature, as those of us who depend on natural resources do.

If the BLM truly values local stakeholders and the way that we interact with public lands, it must consider how the people, wildlife and use of our public lands impact our farms and other private lands. The BLM can only do this by looking at the lands as a whole and collaborating with landowners at the landscape-level. This is part of the reforms that the BLM is proposing to make and local government will continue to have a strong voice in this common sense way of managing land.

The reforms to planning that the BLM is proposing seek to provide more participation and transparency earlier in the process. This means more participation and transparency for the counties, States, tribes and even folks like me. As we all care about and manage our land, we should all agree that more conversation and a better understanding of how we're having an impact to each other upstream and how we're impacting each other downstream is better for everybody.

Thank you for listening.