

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE
GOVERNOR



KRISTEN JURAS
LT. GOVERNOR

July 1, 2021

Nada Culver
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Bureau of Land Management
760 Horizon Drive
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John Mehlhoff
State Director, Montana/Dakotas
Bureau of Land Management
5001 Southgate Drive
Billings, MT 59101

Ms. Culver and Mr. Mehlhoff:

Today, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Montana/Dakotas Malta Field Office released the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the American Prairie Reserve Bison Change of Use (DOI-BLM-L010-2018-0007-EA), and a related Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). Each document relates to the American Prairie Reserve's (APR) proposal to modify certain terms and conditions of BLM-administered grazing permits held by APR.

The BLM also announced that it would hold one, remotely held, public hearing on the EA and FONSI, and that the public comment period would close on Sunday, August 29. This simply does not constitute an adequate opportunity for public comment and participation.

The State of Montana formally requests the BLM hold in-person public hearings in, at a minimum, each of the affected counties – Phillips, Chouteau, Fergus, Petroleum, and Valley counties – to ensure Montanans have ample opportunity to meaningfully engage on this matter.

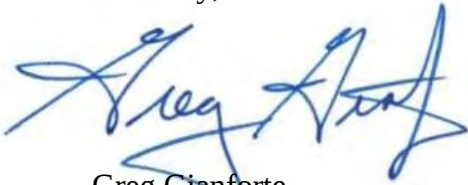
The State also requests a 45-day extension of the comment period, which provides additional time for these critical in-person meetings to occur. Extending the comment period is critical as the BLM's announced public comment period coincides with haying and harvest season.

Given the significance of this proposal to Montanans, State lands, and lessees of both state and federal lands, an extension of the comment period and public comment opportunity will ensure robust, thorough, and necessary public participation occurs.

The Montanans most affected by this proposal spend their days in the field, far from a computer, and in many instances, far from reliable internet service. These Montanans are currently in the midst of an unprecedented drought. I ask that the BLM recognize these compounding factors and take action to facilitate comment and public participation in a comprehensive and meaningful manner. As this process moves forward, it is critical for BLM officials to come out from behind their computers and meet in person, face-to-face with Montanans.

I request your prompt consideration and approval of this request. If you or your staff have any further questions, please contact Mike Freeman at 406-444-3111.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Greg Gianforte", with a stylized, cursive script.

Greg Gianforte
Governor