



BILLING CODE 4331-25

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[A2407-014-004-065516, #O2509-014-004-125222; LLUTG01100]

Notice of Intent to Amend the Vernal Resource Management Plan for Oil and Gas Leasing and Prepare an Associated Environmental Assessment, Utah

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, as amended, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Utah State Director intends to prepare a Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) with an associated Environmental Assessment (EA) to consider opening the federal minerals beneath the Ouray National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas leasing, subject to a no surface occupancy stipulation, and by this notice is announcing the beginning of the scoping period to solicit public comments and identify issues and is providing the planning criteria for public review.

DATES: The BLM requests that the public submit comments concerning the scope of the analysis, potential alternatives, and identification of relevant information and studies, by **[INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE *FEDERAL REGISTER*]**. To afford the BLM the opportunity to consider issues raised by commenters in the RMPA and EA, please ensure your comments are received prior to the close of the 30-day scoping period.

The BLM also requests that the public submit comments on the planning criteria by the same date identified above. The planning criteria are available to the public on the project website at the BLM National NEPA Register (see **ADDRESSES**). To afford the BLM the opportunity to consider comments on the planning criteria in the RMPA and EA, please ensure your comments are received prior to the close of the 30-day scoping period.

A public meeting will be held. The specific date, time, and location of the public meeting will be announced at least 15 days in advance through the project website at the BLM National NEPA Register (see **ADDRESSES**).

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments on issues and planning criteria related to the Oil and Gas Leasing Vernal Resource Management Amendment by any of the following methods:

- BLM National NEPA Register: <https://eplanning.blm.gov/Project-Home/?id=BF84B58C-9075-F111-AB0D-001DD803D7D3>
- Mail: BLM Vernal Field Office, 170 S 500 E, Vernal, Utah 84078

Documents pertinent to this proposal may be examined online at the BLM National NEPA Register link above and at the Vernal Field Office.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Joel Ward, 435-781-3406; address 170 S 500 E Vernal, Utah 84078; email jmward@blm.gov. Contact Mr. Ward to have your name added to our mailing list. Individuals in the United States who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability may dial 711 (TTY, TDD, or TeleBraille) to access telecommunications relay services for contacting Mr. Ward.

Individuals outside the United States should use the relay services offered within their country to make international calls to the point-of-contact in the United States.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This document provides notice that the BLM Utah State Director intends to prepare an RMPA with an associated EA to consider opening the federal minerals within the Ouray National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas leasing, subject to a no surface occupancy stipulation, announces the beginning of the scoping process, and seeks public input on issues and planning criteria. The RMPA would change the existing Vernal Resource Management Plan (RMP).

The planning area is located in Uintah County, Utah, and encompasses less than 5,200 acres of federal minerals managed by the BLM. The surface acreage of the planning area is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as part of the Ouray National Wildlife Refuge.

The scope of this land use planning process does not include addressing the evaluation or designation of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and the BLM is not considering ACEC nominations as part of this process.

Purpose and Need

The BLM's need for action is to consider amending the Vernal RMP in response to external interest in leasing federal oil and gas minerals beneath the Ouray National Wildlife Refuge, in addition to direction in Executive Order 14154, *Unleashing American Energy*, and Secretary's Order 3418, *Unleashing American Energy*. The BLM's purpose is, with consideration of modern drilling technology, to optimize the decisions of the Vernal RMP to be consistent with the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, the Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands, and the BLM's oil and gas leasing regulations at 43 CFR

3100.3(a)(2)(xii), 3100.3(b)(2)(xiv), 3101.13(c), and 3101.52(d), which provide for the orderly and environmentally responsible development of federal oil and gas resources within wildlife refuges managed by the USFWS, subject to appropriate protections to wildlife species, populations, and habitats in such refuges.

Preliminary Alternatives

The BLM is considering two preliminary alternatives in the RMPA – a No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action. The No Action Alternative would continue the closure of the Ouray National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas leasing contained in the Vernal RMP. The Proposed Action would amend the Vernal RMP to open the federal mineral estate underlying the Refuge to oil and gas leasing subject to a no surface occupancy restriction. As a result, lease development would have to be accomplished through directional or horizontal drilling from well pads outside the Refuge boundary. The BLM welcomes comments on all preliminary alternatives as well as suggestions for additional alternatives.

Planning Criteria

The planning criteria guide the planning effort and lay the groundwork for effects analysis by identifying the preliminary issues and their analytical frameworks.

Preliminary issues for the planning area have been identified by BLM and USFWS personnel and from early engagement conducted for this planning effort with Federal, State, and local agencies; Tribes; and other stakeholders. The BLM has identified seven preliminary issues for this planning effort's analysis. The planning criteria are available for public review and comment on the project's website at the BLM National NEPA Register (see **ADDRESSES**).

Public Scoping Process

This notice of intent initiates the scoping period and public review of the planning criteria, which guide the development and analysis of the RMPA and EA. The BLM will be holding one in-person meeting at the following location: Vernal, Utah. The specific date(s) and location(s) of this scoping meeting will be announced at least 15 days in advance through the website for this project at the BLM National NEPA Register (see **ADDRESSES**).

The relevant issues identified through the scoping process would influence the alternatives and lease stipulations considered as part of the RMPA. The BLM also requests the identification of potential impacts that should be analyzed. Impacts should be a result of the action; therefore, please identify the activity along with the potential impact. Information that reviewers have that would assist in the development of alternatives or analysis of resources issues is also helpful.

Interdisciplinary Team

The BLM will use an interdisciplinary approach to develop the RMPA in order to consider the variety of resource issues and concerns identified. Specialists with expertise in the following disciplines will be involved in this planning effort: air quality, water quality, minerals and geology, wildlife and fisheries, and economics.

Additional Information

The BLM will utilize and coordinate the NEPA and land use planning processes for this planning effort to help support compliance with applicable procedural requirements under the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1536) and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (54 U.S.C. 306108) as provided in 36 CFR

800.2(d)(3), including public involvement requirements of Section 106. The information about historic and cultural resources and threatened and endangered species within the area potentially affected by the proposed RMPA will assist the BLM in identifying and evaluating impacts to such resources.

The BLM will consult with Indian Tribal Nations on a government-to-government basis in accordance with Executive Order 13175, BLM Manual Section 1780, and other Departmental policies. Tribal concerns, including impacts on Indian trust assets and potential impacts to cultural resources, will be given due consideration. Federal, State, and local agencies, along with Indian Tribal Nations and other stakeholders that may be interested in or affected by the proposed RMPA that the BLM is evaluating, are invited to participate in the scoping process and, if eligible, may request or be requested by the BLM to participate in the development of the environmental analysis as a cooperating agency.

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

(Authority: 43 CFR 1610.2(c).)

Christina Price,

Acting State Director.

[FR Doc. 2026-18054 Filed: 9/2/2026 8:45 am; Publication Date: 9/3/2026]