

Important Topics and Discussions in Sublette County

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting from the interim of the 67th Legislature. Two of the issues I am working on right now are the Bureau of Land Management's Rock Springs Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and property taxes.

The BLM's EIS was recently released and is out for public comment. When finalized, this document will govern the BLM's management of 3.6 million acres in Southwest Wyoming, including an area in southern Sublette County. The BLM's Preferred Alternative B is a community killer and does not reflect the input provided by local and state cooperating agencies. The preferred alternative would designate over 1.3 million acres as new Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) out of the total 3.6 million acres of land in the BLM's Rock Springs Field Office area. This designation, coupled with other restrictions outlined in the preferred alternative, would severely limit mineral development and livestock use throughout the area. Recreational use is also targeted in Alternative B, and would result in thousands of miles of roads being closed. There is no question the Red Desert is an incredible natural area, and it has remained this way even with permitted historical resource users on the landscape.

On September 12 in Pinedale, the Joint Agriculture and the Select Water Committees met to question BLM officials on the Rock Springs RMP EIS. As a member of the Select Water Committee, I made a motion supported by the Committees to request that the BLM pull Alternative B. This motion was part of a letter that the Co-Chairmen have written to push back against the BLM's preferred alternative and the EIS process.

Further, as Speaker of the House, I have contacted the governor's office, committees and individual legislators affected by this EIS. The President of the Senate and I have drafted a letter to submit during the public comment period in which we request the BLM withdraw its designation of Alternative B as the preferred alternative.

In Wyoming we have proven that a balance can be struck between conservation and other permitted use. The BLM's preferred alternative does not recognize this balance and, frankly, it doesn't reflect the multiple-use doctrine, which is a mandate for the BLM. Alternative B fails to respect the customs and culture of Southwest Wyoming and those of us who live, work, and recreate in this landscape.

Our letter also requests an additional 120 days of public comment. Part of Sublette County lies within the Rock Springs RMP analysis area, and I encourage you, regardless of your opinion on this EIS, to provide comments. I will continue to be involved in this process, and push back against Alternative B, while requesting a longer formal comment period.

I continue to work on property taxes. During the last legislative session, I brought two property tax relief bills – one that would have addressed a structural issue with our taxes; the other would have provided more immediate relief to affected Wyomingites.

I believe in order to fully reform residential property tax in Wyoming, we must change the Wyoming Constitution to allow a separate class for residential property. This is why I brought a bill to change our constitution, and ultimately my bill language did pass, as an amendment to another bill. Now the constitutional amendment will be voted on by you, the citizens, during the 2024 election.

I also brought a bill for immediate tax relief: a Homestead Exemption that would have provided about \$600 off your tax bill. That bill was combined with a committee bill and passed the House last session. However, allies of the Freedom Caucus killed HB98 in the Senate Revenue Committee. Further, the Freedom Caucus voted with the Democrats to end debate on the last day of Committee of the Whole, which effectively killed SF136. SF136 would also have brought some temporary property tax relief to Wyoming citizens.

We must find a property tax solution that provides relief to homeowners, particularly elderly homeowners, while not cutting funding to local government and K12 schools to the point they can't provide critical services. There are some interesting ideas being evaluated by legislators in preparation for the upcoming session.

The Rock Springs RMP EIS and property taxes directly impact Sublette County citizens. I will continue to work hard for the citizens of Sublette County to solve these and other issues that impact Sublette County and Wyoming. If you have questions or comments, please contact me at albert@albertsommers.com.