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Historic Preservation Groups, Native American Tribe and Conservationists Oppose Proposed December 2016 Sale by BLM of Oil/Gas Leases in Utah's Famous Nine Mile Canyon and Desolation Canyon Proposed Wilderness

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Salt Lake City: A proposal by the Bureau of Land Management to sell six oil and gas leases in Nine Mile Canyon and the greater Desolation Canyon region has been met with strong opposition by historic preservation groups, The Hopi Tribe, and a coalition of conservation groups. Two of these leases are located in Nine Mile Canyon proper and total more than 1,550 acres; four of the leases are located in the Desolation Canyon region north of Nine Mile Canyon and more than 1,150 acres.

In its [protest](#) to the Bureau of Land Management's Utah State Director, the [Nine Mile Canyon Coalition](#) decried the proposed sale of two parcels in Nine Mile Canyon proper stating that BLM's planning approach for this remarkable area "is leading to the death by a thousand cuts."

"The BLM committed to having recreation and interpretation plans for Nine Mile Canyon – a place of incomparable cultural significance – in place by 2012 as mitigation for gas development on the adjacent Tavaputs Plateau," said Dennis Willis with the Nine Mile Canyon Coalition, "those commitments remain unmet and now the BLM wants to make leasing commitments that may preclude those planned actions. This doesn't make any sense and we call on BLM to defer offering any new leases in the Nine Mile Canyon region until it meets its outstanding obligations."

"Nine Mile Canyon has one of the richest concentrations of prehistoric sites in all of North America, and the BLM has targeted the very heart of this cultural landscape characterized by hundreds of rock art sites, residences, and granaries, said Jerry Spangler with the Colorado Plateau Archaeological Alliance, "it is unfathomable the BLM would sacrifice our collective past on the altar of oil and gas development."

BLM [acknowledges](#) that "Nine Mile Canyon contains one of the world's highest densities of prehistoric rock art" and "is often referred to as the 'world's longest art gallery.'" The Utah Travel Industry [website](#) describes Nine Mile Canyon as an "outdoor museum" that "should be shown the respect due to one of the West's ancient treasures." The cultural resources present in Nine Mile Canyon date back more than 10,000 years. Photographs of the types of cultural resources found in Nine Mile Canyon are available [here](#).

In an [environmental analysis](#) prepared in support of this lease sale BLM conceded that leasing and development of these two leases will very likely impact cultural resources in the Canyon. At the same time, BLM concluded that leasing could proceed because there would be 'no adverse effects' to cultural resources. This kind of inconsistency is the hallmark of arbitrary agency decision making.

In a letter to the BLM, [The Hopi Tribe](#) specifically stated its disagreement with BLM's no adverse effects finding and requested that BLM withdraw the 2 parcels in Nine Mile Canyon from the December lease sale, along with 3 other parcels in the Vernal field office that are important to the Tribe.

In addition to proposing to sell leases in Nine Mile Canyon, BLM is also planning to sell 4 leases in Utah's wild Desolation Canyon region.

Much of the Desolation Canyon region has been proposed for Wilderness designation by conservation groups. BLM agrees that the vast majority of these lands are wilderness caliber landscapes, though under a land use plan put in place by the George W. Bush administration in 2008 this landscape is not currently being managed to protect those values.

"This is a terrible decision to offer leases in the Desolation Canyon region for oil and gas development," said Landon Newell, a staff attorney with the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance. "This area is simply too special to drill. We have [protested](#) the sale of these leases in hope that BLM reconsiders these plans." Photographs of the Desolation Canyon region are available [here](#).

Due to the national downturn in oil and gas prices, oil and gas development has significantly slowed in Utah with only [four](#) drill rigs currently operating in the State, compared to 23 at this same time two years ago. Likewise, the number of [drilling permits](#) sought by the oil and gas industry in 2016 is on track to be the lowest in more than 20 years, since 1993. Finally, oil and gas operators are [sitting](#) on roughly 2.27 million acres of leased federal lands that are not currently in production. In such a down market, and with industry holding on to millions of acres of undeveloped public lands, there is simply no need or demand for BLM to place even more of the public lands on the auction block.

Utah BLM's [sale](#) is scheduled to be held in a first-of-its-kind online sale on December 13, 2016. Currently, BLM is planning to offer 28 parcels for sale in the Vernal field office. The lease sale also is being protested by other conservation and preservation organizations that are not part of this press release including the [Utah Rock Art Research Association](#).

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