

News Release

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BLM, OHV advocates and conservation groups to settle longstanding litigation

Settlement would end nearly a decade of dispute

SALT LAKE CITY – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) together with off-highway vehicle (OHV) advocates and a number of conservation groups today filed in U.S. District Court in Salt Lake City to settle a longstanding legal challenge to land use and travel management plans on approximately 10 million BLM-administered acres in Utah.

If approved by the district court and subject to certain other court actions, the settlement agreement would resolve eight years of litigation brought by a consortium of conservation groups, including the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, The Wilderness Society, and Earthjustice, challenging land use and travel management plans for the BLM-Utah Kanab, Moab, Monticello, Price, Richfield and Vernal Field Offices.

“After more than eight years of litigation, I’m pleased to see these legal challenges put aside,” said BLM-Utah State Director Ed Roberson. “I look forward to focusing our attention and resources on managing Utah’s incredible public lands, unmatched opportunities for recreation, and responsible energy development.”

The tentative settlement agreement was reached through more than six months of intense negotiations overseen by the Circuit Mediation Office for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit.

“This hard fought compromise agreement will focus BLM’s time and resources on the places most at risk,” said Stephen Bloch, legal director for the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance. “We look forward to working with the OHV advocates and federal defendants to get this settlement agreement approved and in place so that BLM can turn its attention to the tasks at hand, including working with all stakeholders to minimize the impacts from off-highway vehicles on Utah’s remarkable federal public lands.”

“I’m certain we will suffer no shortage of future litigation over Utah public lands,” added Paul Turcke, counsel for the OHV organizations. “However, in this unique situation we chose to participate in the settlement process to prioritize and have a meaningful role in recreation management, as it becomes increasingly prominent in the spectrum of public land uses.”

Parties to the settlement agreement include three OHV organizations (*Blue Ribbon Coalition, Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition, Trails Preservation Alliance*), ten conservation groups (*Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, The Wilderness Society, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, National Parks Conservation Association, the Grand Canyon Trust, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Utah Rivers Council, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Rocky Mountain Wild*), and the federal defendants (including BLM and the Interior Department).

Several entities that intervened on behalf of the United States in this case have reviewed the tentative settlement and agreed not to oppose its approval by the federal district court. These include: *Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration, EOG Resources, XTO Energy, Crescent Point Energy US Corp., and Badlands Energy.*

Notable aspects of the proposed settlement include:

- Through a public process, BLM-Utah will prepare new site-specific travel management plans in certain portions of the litigated area over the next eight years.
- In consultation with Native American tribes, the state of Utah, and cultural experts, BLM-Utah will conduct intensive, on-the-ground cultural surveys along routes in those portions of the litigated area for which BLM-Utah will prepare new travel management plans that have a high probability of containing cultural and historic resources. Approaching cultural surveys this way ensures that BLM can focus its limited funds on the artifacts and resources most at risk.
- BLM-Utah will update its 2011 Utah Air Resource Management Strategy and 2013 photochemical modeling analysis to ensure that the air quality impacts of certain oil and gas activity within the Uinta Basin are adequately studied as future development is approved.
- Conservation group plaintiffs will dismiss their remaining claims against the six land use and travel management plans and the November 2014 oil and gas lease sale.

Today’s settlement is subject to final approval by the U.S. District Court in Salt Lake City’s and certain other court actions agreed to by the parties. The tentative settlement can be read here: <https://on.doi.gov/2iue4T2>. Questions and Answers are available here: <http://bit.ly/2jgLyW0>.

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The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land, the most of any Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM’s mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America’s public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. In Fiscal Year 2015, the BLM generated \$4.1 billion in receipts from activities occurring on public lands.