

Urgent call for letters-to-the-editor!

BLM plans to shut science and the public out of logging and vegetation removal projects across the West *Potential aggregate effects are staggering!*

The Bureau of Land Management is proposing a series of overlapping initiatives to expedite the removal of native forests and sagebrush shrublands across the Intermountain West. When approved, these proposals will greenlight BLM to conduct large and controversial vegetation removal projects over millions of acres of public lands without further public engagement or scientific review. The impact to public wildlands, and native plants and animals, will be staggering.

Please help us shine a spotlight – and stop – this travesty. Write a letter-to-the-editor or guest editorial for your local paper!



Background:

For decades, the Bureau of Land Management has been destroying hundreds of thousands of acres of native vegetation like sagebrush, piñon pine and juniper through so-called “vegetation removal” projects, using huge chains, bulldog masticators and front end loaders to crush and pulverize tree and plant life.

They claim such projects improve wildlife habitat, increase forage for cows and wildlife, and restore watersheds by reducing stream erosion and runoff

The best available science ([see this summary](#)), however, shows that such projects yield mixed results *at best*, and often do more harm than good. Often conducted over tens of thousands of acres at a time, the heavy machinery favored in most treatments disturbs fragile soils, harms

native wildlife habitat, increases invasive species prone to wild fire, and results in widely inconsistent results.

Now, BLM is making the situation dramatically worse, and seeking to shield future project planning from most public view and scientific rigor.

Under a series of overlapping initiatives, BLM is essentially eliminating scientific review and public oversight of vegetation removal projects, while ratcheting up the pace and scale of such projects.

In 2020 alone, the agency has approved or is close to approving:

- A [rulemaking](#) that would allow the Bureau of Land Management to thin or cut down piñon pine and juniper forests in multiple projects, each up to 10,000 acres in size, without environmental analysis, scientific oversight, or public review and input.
- A [rulemaking](#) that would exempt vegetation removal projects (including chaining of sagebrush and other native vegetation) up to 4,500 acres in size from the public oversight and scientific review ordinarily required by the NEPA prior to a project being planned and executed.
- A [plan](#) that authorizes in one broad brushstroke the clearing of up to 11,000 miles (667,000 acres) of 500-foot wide “fuel breaks” in forest, sagebrush, and grassland habitats across Utah, Nevada, Idaho, California, Washington and Oregon without scientific oversight, public review of projects, or accountability.
- A corresponding, even broader [plan](#) that would allow the agency to plan and execute vegetation removal projects across a 223 million-acre area in the same six states without scientific oversight, public review of projects or accountability.
- A [rulemaking](#) that would automatically greenlight logging on up to 5,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management-managed forest, as long as the agency determines the trees are “dead and dying” due to a variety of possible “disturbances” such as wildfire or forest pathogens. Again, this would be without any public oversight or scientific review, as would typically be required under NEPA.

The scale and impact of these initiatives is breathtaking! BLM is setting into motion decades of large-scale mechanical vegetation removal projects covering millions of acres across western public lands, including wilderness quality lands proposed for protection, and exempting those projects from scientific review, public oversight and accountability. The impacts to native plant communities and wildlife, as well as our unspoiled wild landscapes in the Great Basin and Colorado Plateau, will be devastating.

BLM should halt these initiatives and put into place a set of sideboards to establish oversight, transparency, accountability and a scientific framework for assessment and review.

Some messaging points you might make:

- Unbeknownst to most people, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has proposed a series of initiatives of historic proportion that will expedite the removal of native piñon pine and juniper forests and sagebrush shrublands across the intermountain West.
- Once these initiatives are final, BLM will be unleashed to remove vegetation from millions of acres of public lands, including wilderness quality lands, without providing for any further scientific review, public input or accountability.
- The best available science shows that large scale mechanical vegetation removal projects yield inconsistent and mixed results at best, and often do more harm than good,

disturbing fragile soils, degrading native wildlife habitat, increasing invasive species and scarring landscapes.

- Ratcheting up the pace and scale of vegetation removal in the face of scientific uncertainty and ecological risk and without appropriate safeguards, as BLM is doing, is simply unacceptable. BLM needs to halt these initiatives and replace them with a set of sideboards that require site-specific scientific review, public oversight and accountability for results.
- If BLM plans are not turned around, the effects on our western public lands will be staggering and irreversible, and the public will lack the mechanism to weigh in on this impactful public lands management activity for decades.

For more information see:

- [Gambling with our Public Lands](#)
- [Fact Sheet on Vegetation Removal on Public Lands – what’s happening right now](#)
- [Recording of SUWA Vegetation Removal Webinar 6 pm](#)

Where and how to submit a guest editorial or letter-to-the-editor

Use [this list](#) to find papers in your region. See *tabs at bottom for your region!* The LTE contact column provides an email address or link where you can submit a LTE or guest editorial.

Your commentary will appear more timely and relevant if you can “hook” it to some current event, such as Trump’s attack on the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the passage of the Great America’s Outdoor Act, or how the pandemic has underscored the value of our public lands. For example, this Salt Lake Tribune editorial, [“Americans embrace their public lands and Utah is better for it.”](#) provides a great hook if you lead off with something like “As the Tribune recently editorialized, Americans love their public lands, which is why they should be alarmed at the plan to remove scientific review and public input on the expansive clearcutting of piñon pine forests and sagebrush shrublands.”

Referencing an existing event or article is not essential, however, especially if you write a guest editorial where you have more space to explain the issue as you make your commentary.

If you’d like some help: We are happy to give your draft a read for accuracy or help with editing suggestions. Just email dave@suwa.org or terri@suwa.org with URGENT in the subject line!

Send us a copy of your submitted and/or published LTE! terri@suwa.org We will share it with other activists.

Share your published LTE/OpEd on social media! Suggested hashtags: #ProtectWildUtah, #publiclands #wilderness #utah

LTE Writing Skills



Letters-to-the-editor (LTEs) are a powerful, *short-form* way to influence decision makers and shape public opinion. Decision makers pay attention to LTEs as they demonstrate public opposition or support for current issues. Your opinion matters!

Format & Structure

Opening: Begin with a statement that defines you and your personal connection to stopping the wholesale removal of healthy pinyon-juniper forest and sagebrush ecosystems. Summarize your connection in a strong opening statement. This is the place for *your views*, not someone else's.

Body-Reference Article or Action: Be specific about the article you're responding to or the particular egregious action that you're writing about. Quote a short, offending line from the article if needed.

Body-Concisely State Your Main Message: What specific action or event are you seeking to change by writing. What specifically is your opposition based on. Use facts & figures (see *Vegetation Removal Messaging Guide* document).

Closing: Finish with your strongest, most passionate re-statement of your opening. Treat this forum as a megaphone to magnify your voice. Convey a "call-to-action" here.

Crafting & Conveying Your Main Message

Write a Rough Draft: Spill your thoughts out. Write more than you can submit. LTEs frequently are limited to 200-250 words.

Whittle it Down:

- * Keep it short, simple and concise: the KISS principle
- * Discard unnecessary, blustery adjectives. They detract, not add, to your point.
- * Write with a light, witty touch (editors love humor behind your serious message)
- * Don't write a "turf" letter (don't cut and paste from our Messaging document)

Final Editing: Have someone else read and edit your draft. Make final edits. Submit!

Submission Process & Tips to Getting Published

Follow the published rules for the paper: Don't ask to be the exception, especially regarding word limits. Submit exactly how the paper asks you to. Non-conforming letters are usually discarded.

Sending your letter: Write the word "Letter" or "Opinion" in the subject line, usually via email or through a webform found on the paper's website.

Timing: Send your letter in the middle of the week, when fewer letters are received. Be the first to submit on your topic. Fresh, new subject matter catches the attention of editors.