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U.S. SENATOR *for* COLORADO

Public Engagement Opportunity on Public Land Exploration (PEOPLE) Act

U.S. Senator Michael F. Bennet

The current Administration's devotion to energy development has often come at the expense of our public land, water, and wildlife. While county commissioners, local elected leaders, and the American people rightfully want to participate in public lands management, over the last few years the Bureau of Land Management has eliminated avenues for public input and participation, creating conflict that could lead to future litigation and undermining confidence in the leasing process. This bill would restore the public's vital role in shaping oil and gas leasing decisions on our public lands.

The PEOPLE Act would:

Increase Transparency for Lease Nominations and Bids, by requiring agencies to directly notify public land user groups (recreation groups, grazing, water interests, outfitters and guides, etc.), surface owners, and local governments of upcoming actions, while also publishing this information online. Additionally, it would ensure that the general public can see who is nominating parcels for lease sales and who is bidding on these parcels.

Establish Straightforward Notice and Public Comment Periods, by requiring at least 90-day notice prior to lease sales and 30-day notice prior to approving applications to drill, lease modifications, or changes to lease stipulations. Under the bill, lease sales would require a minimum 30-day scoping period, 30-day public notice and comment period for draft environmental determinations, and a 45-day protest period.

Improve Coordination with Local Governments and Other Federal Agencies, by ensuring that local governments near lands proposed for lease are provided, at a minimum, the opportunity for public notice and comment as described above. Under the bill, prior to a lease sale, the Department of the Interior must also obtain consent from federal agencies who manage the surface estate (for example, the U.S. Forest Service when leasing in a National Forest).

Minimize Conflict in Split-Estates, by requiring operators to try to reach a formal agreement with surface estate owners prior to exploration and drilling activities. Under the bill, operators must inform surface owners of future exploration and drilling plans and provide surface owners with financial assurances in case surface resources are damaged.