

## **FMG-RMPA-EIS VPM Meeting 2 - 2020-05-15**

- Good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining the Farmington Mancos-Gallup Resource Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement Virtual Public Meeting. My name is Theresa Ancell, and I'll be your moderator today. Just a little bit about me. I'm from the Four Corners area, and I work for a local consultant here. We will be presenting live here via Zoom app. You can join that online webinar from the Zoom app on your computer, phone, or tablet by using the login information that was provided to you via email and when you registered.

So we'll also have a phone-in options should your computer, tablet, or phone not have the capabilities to run the app. And you can phone in, if you're able to hear this, at 1-346-248-7799, and the user member ID number is 976 479 3372. And we'll go over that again later. I'll be giving this information every couple minutes as folks are joining. So just stay tuned and we will provide that information shortly.

So while you're waiting, this might be a good opportunity to make sure that you're using the Zoom app, so you need to download that from the internet and log in as yourself. That will allow you to join properly using the login information that was provided to you. Also, this is a great time, if you haven't done so already, to make sure your Zoom is 5.0 or greater. So do that update now since we'll be having a little bit of time before we get the presentation started.

Just going to give it a couple of minutes, let folks join, and then I'll give some instructions again as folks are joining.

Good morning, everyone. Hopefully you are all having an OK time getting on the Zoom app. If you need some time, we're going to give you a few more minutes before we start the presentation, so don't panic. If you're having a really hard time, you can also dial in on the phone and that number again is 1-346-248-7799, and then the webinar ID number is 976 479 3372. Again, I'll repeat the phone number. It's 1-346-248-7799, and the webinar ID is 976 4792 3372.

If you registered online, your confirmation email should have been provided to you with the phone-in-- should have been provided to you. If you registered using our operator phone number, you will only have the option to join by phone. Right now we will have a chance to go ahead and take a couple more minutes to download the Zoom app and make sure your web browser's onto your computer, and make sure you have a version of 5 or greater. They did a update, sent out a new version, so if you're having any issues, that might be a problem. We're going to start the meetings-- the meeting in a few minutes.

Thank you, everyone, for joining. My name is Theresa Ancell, and I'm going to be the moderator today. I'll help once we get into the comment section. So right now I just want to welcome everyone and thank you for being here. At this time I will turn it over to Jillian Aragon from the BLM. Jill?

- Hey, everyone. My name is Jillian Aragon, and I'm the Public Affairs Specialist for the Bureau of Land Management Farmington District Office. We welcome and thank you for participating in

the Farmington Mancos-Gallup Resource Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement Virtual Public Meetings.

For this presentation, we will refer to this project as the RMPA. The Bureau of Land Management, BLM, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, BIA, appreciate you joining us virtually as we navigate through these difficult times. Before we begin the presentation, we would like to take this opportunity to go over some housekeeping items to ensure that you are able to access the information we are providing today.

The audience is joining us through a variety of different ways. Some are listening and viewing this online, others joining by telephone, and some may be viewing this presentation after the live session has ended. During this presentation, all participant audio will be muted and video streaming turned off. Once the presentation portion is complete, we will begin the comment portion of the session. Additional instructions will be given once we get to that point.

We want to inform you that this presentation is being recorded and will be made available on the project's e-planning website. Closed captioning is available for this presentation by clicking the CC button on the right-hand corner of your Zoom screen. This feature will only be available during the presentation and not during the public comment portion. Transcripts of these comments will be provided with the final RMPA/EIS.

If you are having technical issues with the Zoom interface, you can let us know through the chat box by submitting a question in the Q&A feature. You can do so by clicking the Q&A icon at the bottom of your Zoom window. We will also be using this Q&A feature to address clarifications about the public meeting or draft RMPA/EIS. More complex questions about the RMPA/EIS should be submitted as formal comments.

If it would be easier for you to join by phone, please use this information-- 346-248-7799. Again, that call-in number is 346-248-7799. The member ID that you'll need to put in is 976 4792 3372.

Additionally, this webinar presentation is being streamed live on BLM New Mexico's Facebook page. You can find the page by typing in BLM New Mexico. Those viewing this from the Facebook Live feed need to know that any comments submitted via the Facebook live page are not considered official comments on the draft RMPA. At the end of this presentation, and we will be providing information on how you can submit those formal comments.

Now we will hear from the BLM New Mexico State Director, Tim Spisak at the BIA Navajo Regional Director, Bart Stevens.

**TIM SPISAK:** Good morning. Thank you for joining us today. My name is Tim Spisak and I'm the State Director for the Bureau of Land Management New Mexico. With me is Bart Stevens, the Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Navajo Regional Office. The BIA has teamed up with the BLM as co-lead for this EIS process. Now, the BLM and BIA welcome you to the Farmington Mancos-Gallup Resource Management Plan Amendment Virtual Public Meeting.

We understand that these conversations are often people preferred to be done in person, but right now it is critical that we do our part to keep the American public and BLM and BIA employees healthy and safe. It is also important, though, that we maintain a capable and functioning government to the greatest extent possible during the COVID-19 outbreak. To achieve this, BLM and BIA are using current technology where possible to move forward with important projects, like this Farmington RMPA.

Thanks to all of you who have joined us for this meeting online or by phone today, we appreciate your interest and input. I'll now turn it over to Director Stevens who has also prepared some remarks for this presentation.

- Thank you--

BART STEVENS: Good morning.

- There's Director--

BART STEVENS: Good morning, this is Bart Stevens. I apologize for the slight delay there. I am the Director of the Navajo Regional Office for Bureau of Indian Affairs, and I, too, want to welcome everyone and thank you all for joining us for these meetings on these issues that are very important to all of us. We've all had to adapt and cope with this pandemic, and our commitment to ensuring the health and safety of the public is paramount, and we also dedicated to fulfilling our responsibilities with the government-to-government consultation responsibilities under the Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

We will continue to be available to consult with tribes throughout the EIS process. We look forward to our continued work in this process. We all know that during this crisis, our grocery stores, store clerks, delivery drivers, and other public service personnel, along with so many others that I can't even name, have been selflessly getting up every day to make sure that we get the things that we need to continue our lives. Social distancing bends the curve somewhat and relieves some pressure on our heroic medical professionals.

In moments of crisis, we look out for one another to guide us through one of our darkest times and heal us through a long recovery, and they are risking their lives fighting on the front lines of this pandemic, and of that, we are so appreciative, and we want to say thank you. So at this time, we're going to have a moment of silence to acknowledge and honor our communities and all the personnel that are helping, as well as all our individual families that are out there in this struggle with the rest of us experiencing the same hardships through these difficult times. So now we're going to silence the audio and have a moment of silence. Thank you.

- Thank you again for participating. We will now review the agenda for the meeting. We will begin with a presentation, and then we will accept comments from the public. The presentation will cover the EIS team, the purpose of the meeting, the NEPA process, and the project overview. We expect the presentation to last approximately 25 minutes. I'm going to go over some meeting logistics at this time. If you need to grab a pen, now would be the time to do so.

As a reminder, this meeting is currently being recorded and will be available after the meeting has concluded. A Navajo recording of a newsletter describing the project and this process is available and can be found on the project e-planning website. If you're on the computer, feel free to ask questions in the Zoom Q&A feature during the presentation where the BLM and BIA specialists will be working to answer you.

Due to time limitations, these questions will not be read during the meeting and we are asking participants to submit more complex questions as formal comments on the RMPA. Please be courteous to other attendees by not spamming or using profanity in your text when you're chatting. The public comment portion of this meeting will begin after the presentation. At the close of the presentation, individuals that have signed up during registration can submit comments. Once everyone who has registered has been given the opportunity to comment, the line will be open to anyone else wishing to provide their statements.

We do have translators available, so please feel free to provide your comments in Navajo. There will be three more meetings after today. You may register for these future meetings either online or by calling 505-635-9701. We will repeat this information at the end of the presentation.

We are here today to help orient you in reviewing the document and provide you an opportunity to provide your comments. The BLM and BIA have placed additional meeting materials on the project's e-planning website. Beyond these meetings, comments will also be accepted through e-planning or by mailing them to the BLM Farmington Field Office or to the BIA Navajo Regional Office. Now onto the presentation that will be facilitated by the BLM Farmington District Manager, Al Elser.

- Good morning, and thank you to all of our participants. My name is Al Elser and I am the BLM Farmington District Manager. Your participation in this process is valued and I appreciate you taking the time out of your day to join us as we look for innovative ways to continue our mission while ensuring that our community remains safe.

The BLM is preparing the draft EIS due to changing oil and gas development patterns in the Mancos shale and Gallop sandstone, collectively known as Mancos-Gallup formations, including innovations in horizontal drilling technology and multi-stage hydraulic fracturing. The BLM will use this EIS to consider amending decisions in the 2003 RMP related to impacts of oil and gas development, as well as rights-of-way, lands with wilderness characteristics, and vegetation. It's important to remember that the BLM's 2003 RMP is still valid, and that this amendment could provide the agency with additional management tools within the decision space defined for the draft RMPA/EIS.

The BIA does not currently have an RMP for these lands, so they will be using this EIS to evaluate alternatives and resource impacts related to its authority over mineral leasing and associated activities decisions within the planning area. The BLM and BIA are preparing the draft EIS in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, or NEPA, which requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of proposed federal actions prior to making decisions.

While preparing this document under NEPA, the BLM and BIA were required to comply with all applicable federal regulations. Examples include the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and the Clean Water Act. Our project managers for this project are Sarah Scott from the BLM and Robert Begay from the BIA.

We also have a team of resource specialists from both agencies collectively known as the interdisciplinary team. This team assisted in the development of the draft Environmental Impact Statement or EIS, and they are joining us today to help provide clarifications to the draft EIS. They will be doing so through the Zoom Q&A function noted previously.

The draft EIS was developed based on input from agency staff, cooperating agencies, and the comments we received during our public scoping process. There are 23 cooperating agencies in total, including federal, state, and local governments, tribes and pueblos, and Navajo Nation chapter houses.

This slide provides an overview of the NEPA process. The first step of the EIS process is to publish a notice of intent in the Federal Register. For this EIS, us the BLM published a notice of intent in 2014. After the publication, the BLM conducted public and internal scoping to identify issues, provide resource and other information, and developed planning criteria to guide preparation of the draft EIS document.

In 2016, after the BIA joined us co-lead, another notice of intent was published in the Federal Register, followed by an additional round of public scoping. After completion of scoping, the agencies began preparing the draft EIS. Scoping input from the public and ongoing work with cooperating agencies, resource specialists, and other stakeholders helped the BLM and BIA develop a range of alternatives and establish a framework for our analysis.

The notes of availability of the draft EIS was published in the Federal Register on February 28 of this year. This began the 90-day public review and comment period, and it's the step we are currently on for the NEPA process. The agencies will be accepting comments on this document through May 28.

After the 90-day public review period, the BLM and BIA will review the comments that were submitted and begin to incorporate them into the final EIS document as appropriate. Once the final EIS document development is complete, we will publish a notice of availability announcing the final EIS, which will begin the 30-day public protest period. The draft EIS can be found online at [www.blm.gov/nm/farmington](http://www.blm.gov/nm/farmington). Hard copies have been distributed throughout Northwest New Mexico. Please contact us and we can direct you to the nearest location.

There are four volumes to the draft EIS. Volume 1 contains the draft itself. It introduces the project and explains the purpose and need. It also describes the alternatives, the affected environment, and the consequences of each alternative. The executive summary in this document will give you a brief overview of the purpose of the project and what to expect to find within the document. Tables 2-2 and 2-3 offer a look at the specific range of alternatives for which resource management updates are being considered.

Volume 2 includes a series of appendices with a variety of supporting information, including maps and figures. And volumes 3 and 4 are supplemental reports that describe in more detail the affected environment and the environmental consequences of each alternative. The map that you are seeing now is the state of New Mexico. Highlighted on this map in the northwest corner of the state are the lands referred to as the planning area.

As we zoom into that portion of the state, we are showing the planning area that is being covered by the BLM's analysis. Boundaries of the planning area expand from the Colorado-New Mexico boundary to the north, down the south near the Becenti and Pueblo Pintado Chapter House areas, and from the area known as the hogback to the west, reaching to the eastern edge of the Jicarilla Apache Nation border.

The planning area includes San Juan, Rio Arriba, Sandoval, and McKinley Counties, covering almost 4.2 million acres with the BLM and BIA responsible for managing approximately half of those acres. However, the decision area, or those lands that are affected by this RMPA, is much more focused and does not include all lands within the planning area.

The map is now showing the BLM's decision area for this RMPA/EIS effort. Only the areas in yellow on this map are subject to the updated management prescriptions being considered in the document. Existing leases will continue to operate under their current terms and are subject to the decisions outlined in the BLM's 2003 RMP. Once the final decision on this document is made, any new leases issued would be subject to the land use allocations and management decisions of this RMPA/EIS.

Now we'll show the BIA's decision area. Similar to the BLM, only the areas shown in brown on this map are subject to considerations in the document. We'll now merge both of the two maps together to show the decision area for both agencies. As you can see, the agencies are working together to manage the overlapping complex landscape.

The alternatives that the BLM and BIA developed offer a range of possible management approaches from the decision area. We have each identified five alternatives, including eight BLM subalternatives that would apply specifically to fluid mineral leasing management around the boundary of Chaco Culture National Historic Park. The draft EIS presents to varying degrees to which resources could be impacted under each alternative. This will be dependent on the theme of the alternative, nature of the resource, allocation of the resource, and the proposed action, and other factors.

While each agency developed its own range of alternatives, the general themes of each were similar across agencies. The no-action alternative consists of continuing current management outlined in the 2003 RMP. Alternative A places an emphasis on natural ecosystems; alternative B emphasizes Chacoan and cultural landscapes; alternative C emphasizes land health and traditional and cultural lifeways; and alternative D places an emphasis on maximizing resource protection while minimizing impacts to surrounding areas.

The BLM and BIA are responsible for signing their own decision for this project, and both agencies are recommending alternative C as the preferred alternative. The goal behind the

agencies identifying a preferred alternative is to get the public to provide more focused comments. It is important to understand that even though the agencies have both indicated a preferred alternative, they are not obligated nor required to select alternative C for their final decisions. They may select another alternative, or the final decision may include components of each alternative, provided that the impacts of the management tools are consistent.

In accordance with NEPA, the next step in the process will be to review the comments we received during the public review period and prepare the final EIS. A notice of availability will be published when the final EIS is ready for public review. This will begin the 30-day public protest period for the plan.

Upon completion of the protest resolutions, the agencies will prepare and sign the record of decision for the approved RMPA. The BLM and BIA will each sign their own records of decision for this process. Once the record of a decision is signed, the updated management tools would become available for use by the agencies. Our goal is to sign a record of decision in early 2021.

This wraps up the presentation phase of this meeting and we will now be shifting into the public comment portion. I'm going to transition back to Jill so that she can provide you with further instructions.

JILL ARAGON: As AI stated, we will now begin the public comment portion of this session. If you have not had the opportunity to review the draft the EIS, you can find the document on BLM's e-planning website where you can also provide comments. The comments you provide on the draft EIS can assist the agencies in ensuring that we have completed a thorough analysis so that we are able to make an informed decision.

Substantive, specific comments are the most useful for this process. These comments could include new information about the proposed action, alternatives, or analysis, identify factual corrections or flaws in the analysis, or provide information on different sources of research that could better inform the analysis.

Examples of comments that are not substantive and may not help us change the draft EIS would include the following-- those in favor of or against the proposed action or alternatives without providing any rationale, agreeing or disagreeing with agency policy or decisions without justification or supporting data, not being relevant to the decision area or proposed management decisions, or open, vague questions.

Here are some examples of comments. A poor comment might include, this document is terrible and I am against it. A better comment could be, this document is terrible in that you do not adequately address x impacts that this could have on x resources. And the best type of comment would be one that tells us how you feel about the document, but it also tells us that you have some resource that could assist us in updating our analysis to make a better informed decision.

A comment moderator will be assisting in this next phase by announcing the speakers and ensuring that your phone line is unmuted for commenting. We will be taking comments in the

order that requests were received during registration. We will begin with online registrations first and then to phone registrations. When it is your turn to comment, the moderator will announce you by the name you registered under.

If you're on the web application, when you hear your name, please use the Raise Card feature so the moderator knows you are available and ready to offer your comment. For commenters that are joining by phone, the moderator will identify you by the last four digits of your phone number. When you hear your phone number, press Star-9, and the moderator will on your line and you can begin providing your comment.

Once all registered comments have been given and if time allows, we will open the floor to additional comments. We will offer this to callers on the phone first and then offer to those joining via Zoom. If a person is cut off or does not get that opportunity to provide a comment, they are welcome to submit their comments via the means listed on this screen.

To ensure that we are able to receive as many comments as possible, we are limiting each commenter to three minutes. After three minutes are complete, the commenter's microphone will be muted and we will move to the next person. We want to remind commenters that they are being recorded and to please be courteous to the audience by not using profanity while providing comments.

We ask that once it is your turn to speak and your line is open, to please state both your first and last name, and then spell them for us. We also want to remind commenters that the BLM and BIA are here to take your comments; however, we will not be responding to the comments at this time. Responses to comments will be included in the final comment report that will be published with the final EIS. Theresa will start facilitating the public comment portion of this session.

- Thank you, Jill. We will now get our timer set up. And we do have-- I'm going to call-- I'm going to now call off the next three speakers. So the next-- so the three speakers in line so far are Rebecca Sobel, Brett Pingree, and Oscar Simpson. As I call on you, please raise your hand. If you're on the phone, you can press Star-9, that will allow you to raise your hand. If you're on your computer, tablet, or phone, you can navigate to the toolbar for Zoom and hit the Participants tab. That will pop up and then you will see a Raise Your Hand icon, and you click on that, and it allows you to raise your hand.

OK. I am going to unmute Rebecca now.

REBECCA SOBEL: Can you hear me?

- We can hear you, Rebecca.

REBECCA SOBEL: Great. Do you need me to spell my name?

THERESA ANCELL: Yes, if you could please state your name and spell it for us, that'd be great.



REBECCA SOBEL: Hi, my name is Rebecca Sobel, and that's spelled R-E-B-E-C-C-A S-O-B-E-L.

- OK, you may begin your comment when you're ready. Thank you.

REBECCA SOBEL: Thanks. My name is Rebecca Sobel, I'm the Senior Climate and Energy Campaigner with Wild Earth Guardians, I'm based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, which is why I have broadband internet availability. Yesterday these meetings were pretty broadly and uniformly called out for their racism and inequitable access for participation.

One instance that I'd offer is if I was allowed to see who was participating in this meeting as I would in face-to-face engagement, I would happily and openly cede my comment time and my position to any local community member, person of color, or elder in the room. I'm unable to do that because of this forum.

Because Wild Earth Guardians will be submitting technical comments and because I was so inspired by the actions that happened yesterday, I'll start today's meeting off with a song.

[MUSIC - TWISTED SISTER, "WE'RE NOT GONNA TAKE IT"]

TWISTED SISTER (SINGING): We're not gonna take it.

THERESA ANCELL: Rebecca., We're not really hearing you, so--

REBECCA SOBEL: Did you cut my song off?

THERESA ANCELL: No, ma'am, I didn't do anything. I just-- for some reason it did start right, and then it didn't-- it didn't play.

REBECCA SOBEL: Oh, let me keep going. It's a good song.

[MUSIC - TWISTED SISTER, "WE'RE NOT GONNA TAKE IT"]

TWISTED SISTER (SINGING): We're not gonna take it. No, we ain't gonna take it. We're not gonna take it anymore. We've got the right to choose it, there ain't no way we'll lose it, this is our life, this is our song. We'll fight the powers that be, just don't pick our destiny 'cause you don't know us, you don't belong.

We're not gonna take it. No, we ain't gonna take it. We're not gonna take it anymore. Oh, you're so condescending. Your gall is never-ending. We don't want nothin', not a thing from you. Your life is trite and jaded, boring and confiscated. If that's your best, your best won't do.

THERESA ANCELL: 20 seconds remaining

TWISTED SISTER (SINGING): Whoa, oh oh.

We're right, yeah. We're free, yeah. We'll fight, yeah. You'll see, yeah. We're not gonna take it. No, we ain't gonna take it.

THERESA ANCELL: Thanks, Rebecca. So next on deck we have Brett Pingree. Brett, are you on the phone? Or are you on-- I don't see you on the list, so if you're on the phone-- oh, here we go. Thank you, Brett. If you could just state your name and spell it for us, please.

BRETT HENRY: Yes, it's Brett Pingree. B-R-E-T-T; last name, P-I-N-G-R-E-E. Thank you. I'm-- I don't have a comment at this time, I'm in information-gathering mode and I appreciate the presentation and the opportunity. I'll cede the floor to the next speaker.

THERESA ANCELL: Thank, Brett. We appreciate you. I'm now going to call off the next three speakers just so we have the next in queue. So up next we will have Oscar Simpson. Oscar, if you can raise your hand by Star-9 on the phone, or if you're online, you can raise your hand with that Raise Hand icon. After Oscar, we're going to have Paul Reed and then Patricio [INAUDIBLE]? Sorry, Patricio. After Patricio we're going to have Dan Roper, and then Stephen Harris. So at this time, Oscar-- Oscar, are you available? Oscar Simpson.

OK. I'm not seeing Oscar. Paul Reed, you're up next. Paul, if you can raise your hand, that would be great. Thanks, Paul.

PAUL REED: OK, yeah, thank you. My name is Paul Reed, it's P-A-U-L R-E-E-D. And I'm on today representing Archaeology Southwest, also the Society for American Archaeology, and the New Mexico Archaeological Council.

What I want to start out with this morning-- I want to say good morning to everyone, and I want to reiterate what I heard yesterday in the meeting and some today so far, which is, I'm joining this virtual meeting under protest. Many, many groups do not have access to broadband internet in order to participate in a digital meeting, and many of us have asked the Department of Interior and the agencies for an extension of the May 28 deadline given the COVID-19 crisis. We've had no response on that.

I also feel in an opening remark that the lack of data from the two ongoing federally-sponsored ethnographic cultural studies is a travesty as we consider allowing this process to go forward. This information is going to change dramatically the possible range of alternatives that would be considered by the agencies. I want to say that among the alternatives, B1 is the only real choice and a really bad field of poor alternatives.

Now overall, we at Archaeology Southwest are appalled that Secretary Bernhardt has refused to extend the May 28 deadline that many, many groups have asked for. Our New Mexico congressional delegation with Tom Udall leading the All Pueblo Counsel of Governors, many individual pueblos and tribes, the New Mexico State Department of Energy Minerals and Natural Resources, the Chaco Coalition that we're a part of, other Chaco coalitions, many, many groups.

Now given that the agencies have been working on this planning process since, what, late 2013, it's unclear why the Department of Interior and the agencies are in such a hurry to complete this

process. With the price of oil way down currently because of the crisis, there's absolutely no reason to rush this planning process and thrust a hasty decision on New Mexicans that puts thousands and thousands of historic sites, sacred sites at risk, as well as the folks living out at ground zero.

The current COVID-19 crisis is severely impacting folks across the state of New Mexico. Three of the worst outbreaks border the greater Chaco landscape, the focus of this planning process in McKinley, Sandoval, and San Juan Counties. As our state faces the worst crisis in decades, now is not the time to try to continue with this process.

For the public process required by law, we feel that the video conferencing is an incredibly poor choice. So I want to be very clear here as I wrap up, virtual video broadcasts are not a substitute for the in-person meetings required by the NEPA law. This approach will disproportionately impact the ability of tribes and other rural populations to be part of this required public process. We again urge the agencies and Secretary Bernhardt to extend that deadline that's coming up in two weeks. Thank you.

- Thank you very much, Paul. Appreciate your comment. Next on board we have Patricio [INAUDIBLE]. I'm sorry about the pronunciation. Patricio, are you on the line? OK. Up after Patricio is Dan Roper, Stephen Harris, and Pamela Nelly. Do we have Dan Roper on? There's Dan. Just one moment, Dan.

OK, Dan, you should--

DAN ROPER: Great. Yeah, thank you, Teresa. It wasn't my intent to make a public comment today, but I just wanted to echo the comments just shared by Paul Reed and just say that I don't feel that this format equates to meaningful participation, especially in light of what's going on in many New Mexico communities both within and adjacent to the planning area, and we'd just like to just go on record again encouraging BLM and others to grant a common extension and allow for more meaningful public participation going forward. Thank you.

- Thank you very much, Dan, for your comment. Up next we have Stephen Harris. Stephen Harris, if you could raise your hand, that would be great. Not seeing Stephen So the next three callers will be Pamela Nelly, Sierra Spencer, and Felina Romero. Is Pamela Nelly available? OK, no Steve Harris and no Pamela Nelly. Sarah Spencer? Sarah, you're up next. Are you on the line?

I'm not seeing Sarah's name in the list, so we'll go ahead and move on to Felina. Felina Romero, are you on the line? Could you please raise your hand if you are? I'm actually not seeing her on the list. So unless she's on the phone-- Felina, if you're on the phone, Star-9. OK. Next on deck we would have Richard Smith and then Tom Vaughan. Tom Vaughan is our last registered commenter.

So Richard Smith. Richard, if you're on the line, you can-- there you go. OK, we have Richard. Richard, you should have the ability to talk, and when you're ready, please state your name and spell it for us.

RICHARD SMITH: Good morning. My name is Richard Smith Sr. I serve as the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Pueblo of Laguna. I've been authorized by Governor Wilfred Herrera, Jr. to make these comments on behalf of the Pueblo of Laguna. The leadership of the Pueblo is not able to attend this or any virtual-- any other virtual public meetings because they must remain laser focused on addressing the urgent health and safety needs of our community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Pueblo of Laguna has a significant interest in the RMPA due to potential impacts on the sacred landscape of the greater tropical region, which contains many of our cultural resources, including traditional cultural properties. The Pueblo of Laguna, in addition to other pueblos, maintain a significant and ongoing connection to the greater Chaco region. It is a vital part of our present identity that we interact through song, prayer, and pilgrimage. Now more than ever, connections to our Pueblo identities are a source of strength in difficult times. We must ensure that these connections will not be irreparably severed, but maintain intact for future generations that will surely follow this crisis.

Because of our deep connection and responsibility to the sacred landscape in future generations, we and other pueblos have thus far been deeply engaged in the RMPA. The AIPC, APCG, individual pueblos, our Pueblo of Laguna, the entire Mexico Congressional Delegation, state agencies, impacted communities, conservation organizations, and many others have submitted requests for a pause in the RMPA, including processes related to the draft RMPA and EIS in Section 106. You have not responded to our request.

The situation on the ground has only grown more dire since our first request. At present, San Juan County and McKinley County have some of the highest of COVID-19 in the state of New Mexico in the country. The Pueblo and Navajo-- and the Navajo Nation have also had significant COVID-19 cases in our communities, threatening the very lives of our people, including our elders.

Our elders often play a critical role in advising our tribal government and cultural resources-- our cultural resource issues, a significant area of evaluation under the draft RMPA and EIS. For this reason, we and other stakeholders living in these affected communities are in no position to focus our attention on the RMPA.

You are required by multiple federal statute, your tribal--

THERESA ANCELL: 30 seconds.

RICHARD SMITH: --duties, and trust responsibilities to meaningfully participate. On March 20, the public state of emergency was declared by the Pueblo of Laguna on all lands subject to the jurisdiction of the pueblo in response to COVID-19. The pueblo administration continued to provide essential public safety, welfare, and other required service. A lot of state travel has been suspended for the duration of the declaration unless deemed necessary and approved by the governor to pueblo.

On April 20-- on April 8, 2020, the Pueblo of Laguna, as a supplemental emergency declaration of March 20, issued a stay-at-home order for all Pueblo residents and closure of the pueblo to all nonresidents, which remains in effect until further notice. All tribal buildings are closed to public and all non-essential-- business are closed to residents and the public. A curfew has been implemented for all resident area-- residential areas during those hours of 8:00 PM to 5:00 AM daily.

On April 24, the pueblo administration extended the closure of its tribal operations for an additional 30 calendar days up to May 25 except for those essential services deemed necessary by the Pueblo of Laguna. Employees sent to work from home during this entire period lacked reliable internet or phone service.

Although I am participating in today's virtual public meeting, I want to make clear that the pueblo has not had the resources necessary to fully comment on the draft RMPA and the EIS. Critical documents such as the draft RMPA and EIS requires extensive review, internal convening and dialogue, and technical expertise and drafting comments. It is not possible to meaningfully convene and internally develop comments at this time due to our capacity focused on critical and life-threatening response measures.

We are opposing-- we are opposing the decision of the BLM and the BIA to host these virtual public meetings on the draft RMPA and EIS, and we reiterate to our-- we reiterate our requests for a pause, including an extension of the May 28 deadline to provide comments on the draft RMPA and EIS.

Tribal-- in addition, APCG Chairman Chavarria in a meeting with key officials from the BLM, BIA, and Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Office in February in Washington, DC requested government-to-government tribal consultation on the draft RMPA and EIS. We reiterate this request, formally requested on behalf of the pueblo in person for a meaningful tribal consultation on the draft RMPA and EIS at a time when tribal, state, and federal public directives indicate it is safe to meet in person.

Public meetings are no substitute for government-to-government tribal consultation. The pueblo's intent to comment-- the pueblo intends to comment on the important draft RMPA and EIS to ensure the final RMPA contains the cultural resource protections necessary to protect irreplaceable sacred landscape with a greater Chaco region. Your unwillingness to pause the RMPA, including extending comment deadline, is putting us in position right now that is limiting our ability to do so.

In closing, I simply unconscionably-- it is simply unconscionable to continue with the current schedule for the RMPA, and on behalf of Pueblo of Laguna, I urge you to immediately halt the current schedule and work with tribes and other stakeholders on the development-- on developing feasible time line. Thank you for allowing me to comment.

- Thank you very much, Richard. We appreciate your comments. Next on deck we have Tom Vaughan, and then we had another request that maybe we must have missed. We have a Victor.

Victor, I apologize, I can't remember your last name right now, but we're going to ahead with Tom, and then we'll go to Victor.

TOM VAUGHAN: Can you hear me?

THERESA ANCELL: We can hear you great, Tom. Thank you.

TOM BOND: Good morning, my name is Tom Vaughan. T-O-M V-A-U-G-H-A-N. I was superintendent of Chaco Culture National Historical Park from February 1985 to January 1989. Those 47 months of living at the park with my family were a wonderful and memorable experience. I've continued to follow what's happening at Chaco and the time since I left there. I spent the next seven years, by the way, as Chief of Visitor Services at the BLM Anasazi Heritage Center.

Chaco Culture NHP and six of the Chaco and outliers in the care of BLM are jointly listed as a world heritage site, and rightly so. Chaco is a place of ongoing revelation. I first visited Chaco in 1966 as the seasonal ranger at Mesa Verde. I had just left Anthropology Graduate School at Southern Illinois University where I was told Chaco was a squeezed lemon, and we know everything we need to know about Chaco.

Fast forward 20 years to when I arrived as superintendent in 1985. The National Park Service was just wrapping up the Chaco Project, another intensive squeeze of the lemon. That squeeze led to recognition of road networks and Chaco outliers spread across the San Juan Basin of New Mexico and into Colorado, Utah, and Arizona.

It also left further recognition of the way the Chaco knowledge of the sky was reflected in orientations and alignments of their huge masonry structures on the ground. In the three decades since I left Chaco in 1989, the revelation has continued. Overland transport of logs from the Chuska Mountains we used as beams in Chaco Canyon is now accepted by archaeologists. The passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act-- excuse me-- in 1990 opened the door for constructive consultations among the agencies responsible for Chaco sites and the numerous Native American tribes with historic and cultural connections with Chaco on its resources.

In recent years, we've learned that the winter solstice may well have been celebrated in ancient Pueblo Bonito with ceremonies that included sharing hot chocolate brought up from Mexico. A significant element in this expansion of our knowledge of Chaco and its builders is a better understanding of how Chaco functioned in its larger context, the San Juan Basin, and beyond.

That is why the rush to accelerate oil and gas leasing outside the park is so troubling. There is so much potential for loss of knowledge to better understand this world cultural heritage. What's the rush? Supplies of oil and gas are probably at the greatest abundance they have been in many decades. The glut of oil on the market has companies ceasing operations and laying off--

THERESA ANCELL: 30 seconds.

TOM VAUGHAN: These leases are likely to be banked, not acted on for decades more when-- if-- the market makes their development feasible. The oil and gas in the ground is not going away. It will there in the future, there's no hurry to get it before it goes away. I strongly recommend alternative B1, and a 10-mile perimeter is way too small.

The Native American tribes, the New Mexico delegation, New Mexico state officials, and various other public interest groups have all said wait, let's have a moratorium on further sales and development until there can be a more thorough evaluation of the resources at risk and the development of careful mitigation measures to preserve as much of the cultural heritage as possible.

The only urgency at work here is political. It is advantageous to this administration to sell off as much of the public's marketable natural resources as possible before the November election. Please, do not do this. Please step back and allow for a more measured consideration and approach. Please let the revelation go on. Suspend all further leasing for a period of at least five years, and thank you so much.

THERESA ANCELL: Thank you very much, Tom. We have one last individual that did register to give a comment, Victor Snover. And after Victor, we will be opening it up to those of you on the line if you're interested in providing a comment, so I'll give more instructions after Victor has gone. Victor, if you're on the phone, can you please press Star-9? There we go. I see you, Victor. Hey, Victor.

VICTOR SNOVER: Hi, good morning. Can you hear me OK?

THERESA ANCELL: Good morning, I can hear you great. Thank you, Victor.

VICTOR SNOVER: Great, thanks. My name is Victor Snover-- V-I-C-T-O-R- S-N-O-V-E-R. I'm a elected city commissioner in the City of Aztec and Appointed Mayor of the City of Aztec. And thank you for your time, good morning, everybody. I want to kind of endorse pretty much every comment that I've heard thus far leading up to mine. I, too, come to this meeting under duress and protests. And to hold this during a pandemic that is a literal matter of life and death for many of the local communities affected by this decision is just unacceptable and unconscionable under any reasonable metrics.

I additionally recently sent an email to the Director of the Farmington Field Office for the BLM, and as many have already mentioned, received no response, not even that we accepted-- that we saw your email, nothing at all. And I must admit, as an elected official in the very immediate area to the Farmington BLM Office, I kind of find this a little distressing and unacceptable that local elected officials are not considered important enough to recognize or to even acknowledge their input.

So I have a couple of things prepared. I am joining from Aztec, New Mexico in my home in downtown Aztec where I'm very fortunate to say that myself and my family are healthy, or able to stay safe, and importantly for this particular situation, I have access to broadband internet. I'm also a high school teacher here, and I've seen the firsthand effects of many folks that do not have

reliable access to the internet, making it impossible for them not only to do essential things, let alone to tune into something like this, they just don't have the opportunity.

Regrettably, some of the most directly affected communities-- the Navajo Nation and pueblos-- disproportionately lack internet connectivity and have been hit extremely hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore, most likely unable to join. They have higher priorities right now, like saving the people in their communities, yet we seem necessary to push through with this-- with these hearings as opposed to taking the opportunity to take a step back and allow this thing to normalize before we start making decisions like this.

Indigenous people should not have to defend their ancestral homelands during an unprecedented pandemic. The BLM needs to extend the comment period at least until the threat from COVID-19 is subsided.

THERESA ANCELL: 30 seconds.

VICTOR SNOVER: In order to safeguard irreplaceable cultural, historic, and natural resources from future development, the final Farmington resource management plan should include a minimum of a 10-mile protected buffer around Chaco Culture National Historic Park. For years, the Department of Interior has designated federal land in this 10-mile area unavailable or otherwise remove parcels from oil and gas lease sales. The draft plan's preferred alternative would be a significant step backwards.

Unlike the preferred alternative, alternative B1 would enhance protections for the greater Chaco landscape. I support alternative B1 of the plan to-- of the plan alternatives presented, but also urge you to prepare a supplement to the draft RMPA and EIS in order to examine additional alternatives that emphasize conservation and the well-being of native communities.

This is not the time to be making these decisions and I concur with everybody that has spoken before me that we need to put a pause on this and be more deliberate, and give the main stakeholders-- the Navajo Nation and the pueblos-- the opportunity to recover from this pandemic while their lands and their artifacts are being put under siege by this plan. Thank you, I appreciate your time.

- Thank you very much, Victor. So at this time, we've gone through all of our attendees that had pre-registered using the Zoom registration page. So now we'd like to open it up to registers-- or attendees, excuse me, that would like to give a comment that maybe didn't do that feature or that have decided that they would like to comment.

Those on the phone, again, you can do Star-9, and once we see that your hands are raised, we will pick on you as you raise your hand. So callers, Star-9. Other folks that are on the Zoom app, you can click over your participants tab, excuse me, and click to the Raise Hand feature.

I'm not seeing anyone raise their hand so far. We really value your input, and so please, please feel free to raise your hand. We would love to hear from you. Oh, it looks like we have a taker.



Donald Whyte. Thank you, Donald. We will unmute you, and you should be able to start speaking.

DONALD WHYTE: Can you hear me now?

THERESA ANCELL: Yeah, I can hear you, Donald, perfect. Go ahead and state your name.

DONALD WHYTE: OK. My name is Donald Whyte. Last name, W-H-Y-T-E. I just want to make a brief comment that I share with the feelings of all the other people who have commented. I'm a Ute Mountain Ute tribal member. I'm a former park service employee that spent eight years there Chaco, so I got to know the landscape that extends all the way from Natural Bridges in Utah all the way down to Mount Taylor. And so understanding that perspective makes me very concerned about the path that we're taking now in moving this forward.

I've listened to tribal leaders over the years through various consultations. I've also watched the energy development occur in the area, and I just feel that we should pause because of this COVID-19. I do agree that you are sort of putting the tribes in a tremendous position to protect their culture and protect their people, but also their resources are going to be impacted by these current decisions, but they have no means by which they can also, I believe, fully participate.

Because here, I sit in the Denver metro area with plenty of means by which I can communicate here, and I just can do it here. But if I was back there on my reservation in Southwest Colorado, I would have no means, because I don't think our capability would be able to allow me to participate because it would not be broadband, so I understand that perspective.

But I also know living on the land and working with the resources and the people from all over that come to visit a world heritage site, a national park unit, that the way we're moving now I think it limits your mission ability, whether it be the Bureau of Indian Affairs or the Bureau of Land Management, to allow public participation to the fullest. I also put more in writing, but that is my comment.

- Thank you very much, Donald, for your comment. We really appreciate it. Is there anyone else that would like to provide a comment? And I apologize, we've been letting folks carry on beyond the three-minute timer. We would like to stick to the three minute timer. That allows everyone the opportunity. If you want to speak again, you can raise your hand and you can provide another three-minute comment as well.

So again, folks on the line, Star-9 to unmute-- I mean-- excuse me, Star-9 to raise your hand. We do have just under an hour left, so we will be remaining open-- the line open for commenters that decide to would like to comment later. We will keep this line open and this presentation available for the next hour, so please feel free to comment.

I'm going to go ahead and turn my camera off, and we will wait to see if anybody would like to join. I'll come back on here in a few minutes and provide instructions again. Thank you so much.

Hello again. We do have a commenter. Tom Vaughan has his hand raised. Tom, would you like to provide more comment? You should be unmuted now, Tom. You may have to unmute yourself on your end.

TOM VAUGHAN: Gotcha.

THERESA ANCELL: There you go.

TOM VAUGHAN: Gotcha. Did you say at the beginning of the presentation that the comments that we've just heard are not part of the official record?

THERESA ANCELL: The verbal comments will be part of the official record.

TOM VAUGHAN: OK, so they don't need to be submitted separately in writing to be part of the record?

THERESA ANCELL: If you would like to submit it in writing, we recommend you do that. This will be transcribed as you stated-- as your comment was stated, it will be transcribed exactly that. If you want to submit beyond that, please do that in writing, sure.

TOM VAUGHAN: OK, cool.

THERESA ANCELL: You still have--

TOM VAUGHAN: Thank you.

THERESA ANCELL: --if you want. OK, thank you, Tom. Just a reminder, we are waiting-- we want to remind participants that we're still taking comments. You can join us for a comment if you raise your hand, Star-9, or you can use the Raise Hand function. And please submit any questions in the Q&A. It's a better format than asking myself. That way we can ensure that the team has the opportunity to chime in as well.

We will still leave the line open for the next 15 minutes. So every five minutes I'll get on and I will announce the information on how to comment, how to raise your hand for a comment, verbal comment. And otherwise we will be on hold until we get a participant that would like to make a comment. Thank you.

Hello, everyone. Thank you for your patience. We don't have anyone raising their hand at this point, but I just want to remind, anyone that has previously commented is welcome to comment again during this time. Anyone that hasn't-- didn't sign up for commenting, please feel free to raise your hand and you can give your comment here verbally today.

We are going to leave the phone line open to ensure that we have time for everyone's comments, and that we give the opportunity for those joining late if they would like to make a comment. So again, if you've just joined, we went through our presentation, and we're now just waiting for anyone that would like to make a comment. So please feel free to raise your hand. You do Star-9

on the phone, and if you're on the online application, you go down to the Participants tab, click it, and you should see a Raise Hand feature.

So thank you for your patience, and we will be announcing this every five minutes. Thank you.

Hello, again. I see Mr. Richard Smith Sr. You are up again for a comment.

RICHARD SMITH: Thank you again for the opportunity, Theresa.

- Thank you, Richard.

--Smith, Pueblo of Laguna. My question is on the bottom of the screen on the Zoom page, it identifies a number of 30 questions. Are we going to be able to hear those questions? Or how is that going to be handled? That is my question.

THERESA ANCELL: Thank you, Richard. Again, I want to remind everyone that I'm really not allowed to be having a question and answer, so if you put the question into the Q&A box, then you should be able to see that. That will become also a record of the project. So we really highly recommend to you guys, if you do have questions, to put them in a Q&A box, then everyone can see them, and that's a good feature that will be part of the record. And the answers should be available to all on your side of the field.

Hello, again, everyone. Just want to give you guys a reminder that we are still here to accept comments. And if you would like to raise your hand, either by pressing Star-9 if you're on the phone, or by hitting the Raise Hand button in the Zoom application, we will be on the phone until 11:00 accepting public comments. And I will give a similar message to this every five minutes just so that if anyone has joined recently, they will know that they can still give a comment.

So if you have joined, we recommend you-- and you would like to comment, please let us know by raising your hand. Thank you. Oh great, it looks like we do have Felina Romero. Felina? You should be able to unmute your microphone and begin your comment.

FELINA ROMERO: Good morning.

THERESA ANCELL: Good morning. We can hear you.

FELINA ROMERO: All righty, let me go on here. All righty.

- Please state your name-- please state your name and spell it, thank you.

FELINA ROMERO: Felina Romero, F-E-L-I-N-A R-O-M-E-R-O. OK. I find that it's very upsetting that you guys have this meeting on 9:00 AM in the morning, which is a way to specifically silence some people and leave them out. Like everything like you guys are literally doing is purposely thought out, which is very devastating. And I seen that on the 17th, you guys skipped the whole day. So it's the 14th-- it's the 14th, 15th, 16th, and then the 18th, and you guys

skipped the 17th. And you guys need to extend the comment period most definitely if you're going to have it at 9:00 in the morning.

And once again, please, please acknowledge Article 32 and recognize that we have tribal treaties that we need to respect. And we need to leave their land alone, and we need to stop putting profit over peoples lives, not to mention the oil and gas industry's market just recently went down, so the barrels aren't even going to be worth that much. And we're literally poisoning these people in this state just so we can ship off-- just so we could ship off this oil to give to other countries.

We need to stop being greedy humans and selling this barrels. We need to think about the lives and the future generation. The extractive industry is going to literally lead to extinction to all human lives, to all plant/animal life, to the water's life. And it's very important that we keep these chemicals out of the water cycle. It's going to leave an impact that impacts us for the rest of our lives. Please, please don't take out the oil from the ground. Thank you. And have a good morning, and please do the right thing.

THERESA ANCELL: Thank you very much for your comment, Felina. I want to remind everyone that we do have the line open still. We are still accepting comments from those who have previously commented or from those that would like to give a comment. Again, please raise your hand using the Star-9 feature if you're on the phone or the Raise Hand feature on the Zoom app.

We will take a five-minute-- I will announce this again in five minutes, so if you raise your hand in the meantime, we will let you know you're on board. Thank you.

Hello again, everyone. Just a reminder that we are still accepting public comments. You can raise your hand on the phone by hitting Star-9, and you can also raise your hand on the Zoom app by scrolling over the Participants tab and then using the Raise Hand feature. We'll be announcing this information again in about five minutes. Thanks, everyone.

Hello again, everyone. Your friendly moderator just here to provide you the opportunity. If you still want to raise your hand and provide a question, that option is still available for the next about 20 minutes. So we will continue to hold the line open so that everyone has the opportunity if they join late or anything. And thank you so much for your participation, and we will be announcing this message again in about five minutes. Thank you.

Hello again, everyone. I want to take one more opportunity to announce that we will still be accepting your verbal public comments until 11:00 AM this morning. If you would like to provide a public comment and you're joining us via the phone, you can press Star-9, and that will raise your hand and we will call on you.

If you are on the Zoom app, please use the Participants tab, and there's a Raise Hand feature. You click on that. We want to leave the phone open for anyone-- or the comment period open until 11:00. This will be my last announcement of this, but we will still be monitoring to make sure that you are raising your hands. Thank you, everyone.

Hi again, everyone. I know I said I wouldn't bother you again, but I do want to just make sure everyone has the fullest potential to provide a verbal comment. It's very important to us. So I will announce now that we have five remaining minutes of the meeting. We are still accepting public comments here on the phone. Please press Star-9 to raise your hand and we will call on you. And if you're on the Zoom application, you can raise your hand in the Participants tab.

I want to thank everyone for participating. It's been a pleasure of mine to moderate this meeting. And once we have hit our time frame, I will turn it over to Jillian Aragon. Thank you all so much.

Jill will go ahead and take us on out. Thank you, Jill.

- Thank you, everyone, for your time today. The BLM and BIA value your input, and we will continue to accept your comments on the draft EIS through May 28. Any comments received or postmarked after the May 28 date may not be considered. Please note that the May 28 date is the deadline for the NEPA public comments to be provided; however, the BLM and BIA are committed to consulting with our tribes, consulting parties, and cooperating agencies beyond this date and throughout the EIS development process.

I'll be sharing the information that you can use to provide your comments and who to contact directly if you need further assistance. You can go to the BLM's e-planning tab on the online portal-- [www.blm.gov/nm/farmington](http://www.blm.gov/nm/farmington), or you can leave a voicemail comment by calling 720-213-5786.

You can also mail your comments to either project manager at the following addresses. Sarah Scott, 6241 College Boulevard, Suite A, Farmington, New Mexico, 87402. Or you can send your comments to Robert Begay at 301 West Hill Avenue in Gallup, New Mexico, 87391.

Again, there will be three more meetings scheduled after this one, including one this afternoon that begins at 2:00 PM Mountain Standard Time. You may register for these future meetings either online or by calling 505-635-9701. When you call that number, you'll be able to get the information to do a call-in only. However, if you'd like to join via Zoom, please go to the BLM's project website and register there.

This concludes today's virtual public meeting for the Farmington Mancos-Gallup Draft Resource Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement. Thank you for joining us today. Have a good day and stay well.