



Mountain West News Bureau

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BLM's proposal to elevate conservation gets pushback from Western conservatives

Wyoming Public Radio | By Will Walkey

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Bob Wick/Bureau Of Land Management

Sheep are commonly grazed on public lands throughout the Mountain West.

The Bureau of Land Management [will extend the public comment period](#) through July 5 on a proposal to elevate conservation on its lands. The

announcement follows significant pushback from conservatives, energy companies and ranchers in the Mountain West, who worry the so-called [Public Lands Rule](#) would harm their interests and local communities.

Under the BLM's proposal, conservation would be given equal footing to other land uses, including oil and gas drilling, mining, grazing and timber harvesting. Environmental groups would be allowed to lease federally owned parcels for preservation and habitat restoration.

Republicans in the West – where the BLM oversees [246 million acres of federal public lands](#) – say these changes would undermine the industries that rely on those lands. Speaking during a [recent U.S. House committee hearing](#), Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon said conservation is already a core tenet of management in the West.

“Simply put, if it ain't broke, don't fix it,” he said. “It pits productive uses of public lands against conservation – a gross mischaracterization of the concept.”

Republicans in [western Colorado](#), [Utah](#), [Wyoming](#), [Idaho](#) and Montana are also opposing the BLM's proposed changes. So are some [fossil fuel](#) and [agricultural](#) interests. The U.S. [House](#) and [Senate](#) already have bills to nix it.

But many conservation and environmental groups [are lauding](#) the BLM's proposal. They argue the rule does not impede on existing management activities, but is rather a much-needed update as federal parcels face new threats from climate change and population growth in the West.

"This is a very promising and complementary tool to support landscapes across my county and around the West," said Kathy Chandler-Henry, chair of the Eagle County Board of Commissioners in central Colorado. "The proposed rule further establishes a guiding principle that [the] BLM manage for resiliency."

The BLM had received [nearly 150,000 public comments](#) on the proposal as of Thursday. You can comment [here](#) or [here](#).

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