



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

AUG 23 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As you are aware, the U.S. Forest Service (FS) is working to complete the necessary environmental and other reviews associated with an application to withdraw from mineral location and entry two areas within the National Forest System in the upper Yellowstone watershed for 20 years. These unique lands provide recreational opportunities for local communities as well as the millions of visitors who travel to the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem annually. Completing the necessary reviews and analyses to promptly reach a decision point on this proposal is a high priority for both of our agencies.

The requested withdrawal was announced by the Department of the Interior (DOI) through a notice in the *Federal Register* that published on November 22, 2016. Publication of the notice temporarily segregated the lands for up to 2 years while an analysis is conducted to evaluate the requested withdrawal.

The FS is responsible for preparing the studies and analyses, including appropriate analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), to support the withdrawal decision by me. Within DOI, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is a cooperating agency on the preparation of the NEPA document. The BLM will review the FS studies, reports, and analysis and send recommendations to the BLM Director, who in turn will review and approve the recommendations for transmittal to me for a decision on the withdrawal, in whole or in part.

I strongly support expeditiously moving the ongoing decision process forward, and I want to ensure that it results in appropriate public involvement and an informed decision that protects the natural resources involved. I have been advised that BLM could provide additional assistance to FS that would aid in the ongoing efforts to complete the requisite environmental analyses and reviews. To bring this effort to a conclusion as soon as possible, I have directed the Acting Director of BLM to provide the services of a geologist and a mineral examiner from BLM to assist FS. In the event FS determines that additional assistance would be helpful, we stand ready to provide it.

Finally, while I strongly support the ongoing process, I am troubled that the current withdrawal application failed to request a withdrawal from the mineral leasing laws and the mining laws. Accordingly, I have directed BLM, in coordination with FS, to immediately evaluate whether the current application should be modified to propose a withdrawal from the mineral leasing laws and, if so, appropriately modify the request in accordance with 43 C.F.R. 2310.1-2 and 2310.1-3.

I look forward to continuing to collaborate with you on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Zinke', with a large, sweeping initial 'R'.

Ryan K. Zinke
Secretary of the Interior

It is to be noted that the above is a copy of the original and not a reproduction.

Very truly yours,

[Handwritten signature]

Robert M. Smith
President