

**Statement of**

**The Honorable Jim French  
Humboldt County, Nev., Board of Commissioners**

**Before the**

**Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives**

**Hearing on Local and State Perspectives on BLM's Draft Planning 2.0 Rule**

**Washington, D.C.  
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Chairman Gohmert, Ranking Member Dingell and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today to provide a local county perspective on BLM's Draft Planning 2.0 Rule.

My name is Commissioner Jim French, member of the Humboldt County, Nevada, Board of Commissioners. I also serve as one of Nevada's representatives on the Board of Directors of the National Association of Counties' (NACo) Western Interstate Region. Humboldt County is located in Northern Nevada, approximately 170 miles north-east of Reno. We have a population of 16,528 residents and a land area of nearly 6.2 million acres. Of those 6.2 million acres, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages over 4.3 million acres. Additionally, over 660,000 acres in our county is managed by either the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). All totaled, the federal government owns nearly 90 percent of my county and the BLM alone manages an area in Humboldt County nearly the size of the State of New Jersey.

As a county commissioner in a public lands county and as the Winnemucca District biologist for the Nevada Department of Wildlife for almost 30 years, I know firsthand how important it is for federal land managers to work with local communities. Our citizens travel on roads across federal land to get to work every day and many families make their living working our region's natural resources. Those that live, work and raise their families in my county know that our community is linked to the land. When land management decisions are handed down from Washington, D.C., they impact more than just the federal lands, they impact our community's economy and way of life.

After reviewing the proposed BLM Planning 2.0 rule, I am concerned that BLM:

- Has not provided sufficient time for counties to fully digest and offer comment on the proposed rule change;

- Has proposed changes that will reduce requirements to ensure federal consistency with local policies; and
- Seeks to implement a multistate landscape level of analysis that could diminish the ability of BLM to meaningfully assess the local impacts of management decisions.

**Firstly**, the BLM has not provided sufficient time for the counties to fully analyze and comment on the rule. The proposed rule will have a significant impact on how the BLM plans for and manages its 245 million acres of public lands and 700 million acres of subsurface minerals for years to come. Each of the 477 counties across the nation that contain BLM lands will be impacted by the proposed Planning 2.0 rule. As co-regulators and intergovernmental partners in the land management mission, counties have a significant interest in providing the most meaningful information and analysis possible to help develop BLM regulations. Local governments and locally generated information should play a significant role in guiding the planning process.

Commonly, public lands counties like mine lack the staffing and budgetary resources necessary to employ a full-time natural resources coordinator or similar position dedicated to assessing the impacts of sweeping federal land management actions like Planning 2.0 at the county level. For many public lands counties, obtaining the necessary expertise to fully assess Planning 2.0 and its impacts will require them to contract outside assistance to perform a comprehensive analysis of the proposed rule. Coordination, preparation and approval of outside contractor analysis will exceed the 90 days offered by the BLM for comment. For many more counties, their budgets do not allow them to obtain outside counsel to analyze Planning 2.0's impact. In those cases, the task will likely fall to county commissioners like me who will volunteer to sift through the hundreds of pages that make up Planning 2.0 and try to assess its impact on their communities.

Given the potentially significant impact of Planning 2.0, the volume of information involved, as well as the staffing and budgetary realities facing counties like mine, NACo, along with county governments from across the nation, called on BLM to provide additional time for local governments to analyze the implications of the substantive regulatory changes presented in Planning 2.0.

By allowing sufficient time for counties to offer input and suggest changes to the proposed regulation, local governments can help the BLM mitigate any unintended consequences or challenges posed by the proposed rule, some of which are foreseeable from a local government perspective.

**Secondly**, I am concerned the BLM has proposed changes to current planning rules that will reduce local government's ability to ensure federal consistency with local master plans and policies. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) charges the BLM to "...provide for meaningful public involvement of State and local government officials, both elected and appointed, in the development of... land use regulations..." Public lands counties provide essential law enforcement, search and rescue, public health, transportation infrastructure

and many more services on federal public lands. Rightfully so, FLPMA makes it clear that local governments are not just another member of the public. Local governments interact with our natural resources on a daily basis and hold a wealth of practical, on the ground knowledge that should be actively sought out by federal agencies to inform federal decision making. As elected officials and intergovernmental partners with the federal government, counties must have a seat at the table and an opportunity to help shape management decisions in partnership with land managers.

Integrated land management efforts across levels of government are key to successful land management planning. The Planning 2.0 regulations attempt to change the way the BLM interacts with state, local and tribal governments for land management planning. For example, proposed changes would revise consistency requirements so that resource management plans (RMPs) must only be consistent with officially adopted local land use plans. BLM would not be required to consider locally implemented policies, programs or other local government actions, nor would BLM have to consider local land use plans that are in the process of being crafted or revised. This change could significantly impact the ability of local governments and BLM to work together to address the evolving needs of a community or the local landscape.

Presently, the BLM planning protocol recognizes county planning documents including additions, changes and updates. It is widely recognized that as conditions change, management direction must adjust in parallel. FLPMA requires “consistency with local master plans and policies”. However, changes offered in the proposed Planning 2.0 rule attempt to revise consistency requirements to allow BLM to recognize only plans that have been fully adopted before the planning process begins.

When the original “RMP Winnemucca district” was adopted in 1982-83 Humboldt County had approximately 20% fewer residence and most of our natural resource related jobs had not yet been created. Over the course of the 30 years that the RMP was in place Humboldt County completely revised its master plan three times, created a water and natural resource plan, a regional transportation plan and implemented countless other planning efforts to meet the challenges of our changing community. As these new local plans were implemented, we were able to work with BLM to ensure consistency between local and federal plans. Under Planning 2.0 the addition of new local plans and revisions to existing documents may not be officially recognized by the BLM.

Additionally, the proposed rule seeks to distinguish between “plan components,” which can only be changed by amending or revising an RMP, and an “implementation strategy,” which guides future actions the BLM may take on the land but can be revised at any time without triggering a requirement for consultation with local counties and cooperating agencies. This change fails to recognize that how a plan is implemented can have as significant an impact as the components of the plan itself. By failing to consult and cooperate with local governments on implementation strategies, the BLM would not benefit from valuable local insights. This could result in implementation strategies with significant negative impacts on local communities. Engagement

with local government should not be discretionary. The BLM must be required to engage local governments at all stages of RMP development and implementation.

**Finally**, Planning 2.0 proposes a fundamental shift in the BLM's default RMP planning area. Rather than continuing the policy of utilizing local BLM Field Office boundaries as the default planning area, the BLM has instead proposed a shift toward broader geographic planning boundaries that cross regional districts and, in some cases, even state lines. Shifting the BLM's focus to a regional "30,000 foot level," rather than focusing on discrete local landscapes, dilutes the local voice in resource management planning, empowering regional line managers' decisions far removed from the land.

In my county, by taking a local focus and working with local land managers we have been successful in harmonizing local, state and federal plans to promote recovery in the wake of wildland fire. Following fire events, our response to these events has centered on locally focused planning efforts. We work with our federal partners to coordinate large fire reclamation teams of managers, regulators, and local officials assembled to assess damage and prioritize response efforts on behalf of the citizens and the natural resources impacted by the fire. These efforts have been largely successful due to our team approach of collecting data and coordinating recovery plans to existing local resource plans, regional master plans and other regional strategic plans.

In contrast, a regional approach based at the "basin" level, formulated by disconnected line managers who have no connection to the land, resources or the communities affected by the disaster would not benefit from the kind of on the ground knowledge local governments and stakeholders have been able to provide. I'm afraid a "one size fits all" approach, based in regional directives will result in what is commonly referred to as "analysis paralysis" and a project disconnect. In the case of fire events in our area, when a regional approach has been applied to post-fire restoration the resulting disconnect and delays in action have resulted in a failure to reclaim damaged lands, large-scale infestation of noxious weeds and damage to critical infrastructure. As currently proposed, Planning 2.0 will encourage that disconnect by defaulting to a regional directive not specific to the realities and needs of the local communities or natural resources.

Land management decisions must balance many ecological, economic, historical and cultural factors. In my experience as a county commissioner and a land manager, the management decisions that strike the best balance are those made in close coordination with the local community by individuals with a deep understanding of the landscape. This understanding can only be built over time by being "on the land" and in the community. Defaulting the planning focus to a broader regional scale divorces decision making from the land itself. BLM's focus should remain at the local level and impact decisions should be made, literally, on the ground.

Although I understand the need for flexibility and scalability in planning, establishing a default boundary that does not begin at the local level will only serve to reduce the local voice, cause valuable local knowledge and experiences to be lost to an overly broad perspective, and drown

out the voices of local stakeholders and cooperating agencies in a sea of form letters from national interest groups without a direct connection to the land itself.

Local county governments can be invaluable allies to federal land managers. The necessity for local government to be close to its land and its people makes us a significant resource. Local governments can provide a real-time, on the ground perspective that can help to avoid many of the pitfalls caused by distant land management decisions made in far-off offices. We are at the forefront of protecting both our citizens and the environment. Counties like mine continue to urge the BLM to work with us to implement a Planning 2.0 rule that benefits from significant local government input, guarantees consistency with local plans and ensures robust local cooperation at all phases of the planning process. As a partner with federal land managers in this pursuit, counties want a practical federal policy that works at the local level.