



RURAL COUNTY REPRESENTATIVES
OF CALIFORNIA

April 2, 2020

Mr. David Bernhardt
Secretary
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

RE: Request for Closure of Bureau of Land Management Lands Upon Local Request During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

On behalf of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), I am writing to urgently request that leadership of the Bureau of Land Management-California (BLM-California) be given the authority to close targeted portions or, if need be, entire BLM properties within their jurisdiction upon a county's request. RCRC is an association of thirty-seven rural California counties, and the RCRC Board of Directors is comprised of elected supervisors from those member counties.

Rural counties throughout the nation are facing a myriad of challenges in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the public health and safety of residents of paramount importance. Many of RCRC's member counties have large BLM presence — BLM has jurisdiction over approximately 27 percent of the total land mass of Inyo County including the Alabama Hills National Scenic Area — and normally welcome the economic and social benefits afforded to our communities by the lands managed by the BLM. However, increased and irresponsible public usage of federal lands by those who either ignore or misunderstand the orders put forth by public health officials (which are made by many county public health officers is creating unique challenges). For a large number of rural California counties, controlling the movement of people — particularly urban/suburban non-residents drawn to rural recreation locales — is making it nearly impossible to control the spread of the Coronavirus into communities which lack the capacity to provide healthcare to their residents who may become infected.

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RCRC appreciates the formal closure of developed areas in BLM lands. However, currently non-residents are circumventing similar closures on the national forests by parking outside of those areas and venturing into the forests as they would under normal circumstances. We would foresee a similar tactic on BLM-managed lands. RCRC formally requests that Interior initiate a system to allow BLM-California the discretion to fully close upon request of all/either the Board of Supervisors, Sheriff, or Public Health Officer until the county can fully work through this pandemic. Closure could be either targeted portions or the entirety of a specified BLM property, consistent with recent policy adopted to address closures of National Park Service Lands. We would expect these closures would occur after close consultation with county public health officials.

We appreciate your immediate response and attention to this urgent request to help ensure the public health and safety of rural county residents. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss this request further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Staci Heaton", written in a cursive style.

STACI HEATON
Senior Regulatory Affairs Advocate

cc: Karen Mouritsen, BLM California State Director
Members of the Alpine County Board of Supervisors
Members of the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors
Members of the Inyo County Board of Supervisors
Members of the Mono County Board of Supervisors
Members of the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors