

« SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2018 »

# The Salt Lake Tribune

2017 Pulitzer Prize Winner

<https://www.sltrib.com/opinion/commentary/2018/12/09/commentary-blm-should/>

## Commentary: BLM should listen to Moab voices on leasing plans

December 9, 2018



(Leah Hogsten | The Salt Lake Tribune) Visitors mingled around Delicate Arch to watch the sunset in Arches National Park on Oct. 11, 2014.

[By Kalen Jones and Rani Derasary | For The Tribune](#)

Moab, in the heart of Utah's redrock canyon country, is the gateway to world-renowned Arches and Canyonlands national parks and local gems such as Dead Horse Point State Park, the Colorado and Green rivers and the extensive Bureau of Land Management lands they border.

Unrivaled access to outdoor activities in these breathtaking landscapes drives Moab's economy and draws employees, business owners, families and retirees to call Moab home. Our community's resilient economy is inextricably linked to the health of the public lands surrounding us — something that is gravely threatened by the Trump administration's "energy dominance" agenda.

As longtime Moab residents and current city council members, we have witnessed the economic benefits of the recreation economy and the excitement of visitors discovering the beautiful places surrounding Moab. It is critical that the BLM listen to the voices of our residents and guests when managing our lands.

In Utah, 110,000 jobs and \$3.9 billion in wages can be attributed to outdoor recreation. Recreation on BLM lands near Moab alone is forecasted to generate upwards of \$761 million in economic activity over the next 15 years and support more than 1,000 jobs. Decisions regarding the use of public lands that do not account for our thriving outdoor economy are short-sighted and detrimental to our community.

The Moab City Council supported the BLM's Moab Master Leasing Plan, which was developed in a collaborative manner and balances oil and gas development with other conservation and recreational values. The area around Dead Horse Point State Park has been industrialized by a patchwork of drill pads and pipelines. The MLP was intended to consider those types of impacts to not further damage Moab's image and landscape. Due to the "energy dominance" agenda, iconic landscapes like Canyonlands National Park and Labyrinth Canyon are at risk.

Next week, the BLM is poised to auction off 105 parcels in Utah, totaling 154,226 acres, for oil and gas development. A number of these parcels are within the Moab MLP and near the site of a 2014 oil spill that contaminated the Green River and Labyrinth Canyon from a remote but allegedly properly maintained well.

Many proposed lease sales across the West have been temporarily deferred until February/March 2019 thanks to a ruling from Chief U.S. Magistrate Judge Ronald E. Bush of the District of Idaho. Unfortunately, parcels surrounding beloved Utah destinations are still on the chopping block with significantly reduced opportunity for public comment.

Despite Bush's declaration that the current administration is unlawfully circumventing public participation opportunities of several bedrock environmental laws, we are still seeing preferential treatment for oil and gas companies operating on public lands.

The community in and around Moab understands the importance of public lands recreation and conservation to our culture and economy. It is imperative that we have an opportunity to speak up about land use that affects our way of life. It is critical that the BLM listen to all stakeholders and take a hard look at the consequences increased oil and gas drilling will have on our public lands and communities. Any drilling proposals must factor in the increased impacts to our air and water quality, climate and economic prosperity.

The December lease sale undermines the collaboration, compromise and local participation that

went into the Moab MLP. The sale's Determination of NEPA Adequacy ignores the MLP's clear directive that additional site-specific analysis be done for new leases within its boundary.

The BLM should listen to the public when managing public lands and defer these proposed December leases until thorough public participation and environmental analyses are conducted.

**Kalen Jones** *has lived in Moab for 27 years, and* **Rani Derasary** *has lived in Moab for a mere 18 years. Both are members of the Moab City Council. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and not intended to represent the council as a whole.*