

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 12, 2017

Mr. Michael D. Nedd  
Acting Director  
Bureau of Land Management  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Acting Director Nedd:

The recent publication of internal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) strategy and communications documents has provided some disappointing insight into the intended focus of the BLM during the current administration. Particularly with respect to energy, the “priority work” listed for the BLM indicates a return to the philosophy of the George W. Bush Administration, which prioritized leasing and permitting for oil, gas, and coal above all other uses, and led to a situation where the BLM was unable to adequately meet its responsibility to be a good steward of our public lands.<sup>[1]</sup> Specifically, the directives to “make additional lands available” for energy development and “streamline” fossil fuel leasing and permitting indicate that the agency intends to focus on energy development at the expense of conservation, wildlife protection, recreation, air and water quality, and all other values.

One of the more surprising items in the document is the instruction to, “[a]ddress backlog of Applications for Permit to Drill (APDs)”. It is not clear that there is a significant backlog of unprocessed APDs; in fact, the BLM’s own data indicate that there is a glut of drilling permits that the oil and gas industry cannot act on fast enough. According to the BLM’s FY 2017 Budget Justification, there were 3,785 APDs pending at the end of Fiscal Year 2015, but also 7,532 approved permits in industry’s hands just waiting to be used. Obviously the BLM isn’t responsible for individual company decisions on when to drill, but it is bewildering that the agency would prioritize approving more permits—at the inevitable expense of your environmental responsibilities—when companies have plenty and appear to be simply stockpiling them.

Furthermore, it appears that the BLM may be resisting providing updated data on the number of approved but unused drilling permits. The BLM’s oil and gas statistics for Fiscal Year 2016 were posted on March 13, 2017, yet as of the date of this letter, and despite multiple requests from my staff, the table “Approved Applications for Permit to Drill – Not Drilled” still shows FY 2015 numbers. Considering that this data is typically provided in the annual budget justification, which is regularly issued in February or March, it seems unlikely that the FY 2016 data is not available.

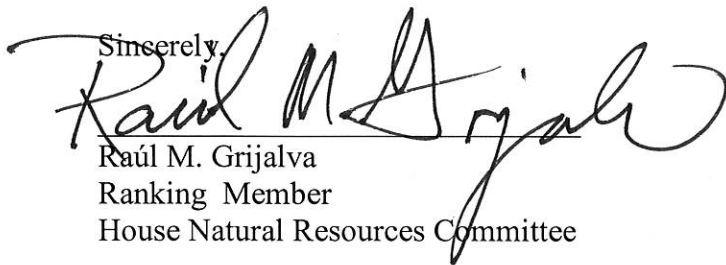
---

<sup>[1]</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Oil and Gas Development: Increased Permitting Activity Has Lessened BLM’s Ability to Meet Its Environmental Protection Responsibilities*, GAO-05-418, June 2005.

Therefore, in order to understand the true nature of the "backlog" of APDs, I request that at the earliest possible opportunity you provide the public and my staff with the number of APDs pending and the number of approved APDs waiting to be drilled as of the end of Fiscal Year 2016.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Raúl M. Grijalva". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Raúl M. Grijalva  
Ranking Member  
House Natural Resources Committee