

[Controversial BLM Rock Springs Plan Could Devastate Tourism, Boosters Say | Your Wyoming News Source \(cowboystatedaily.com\)](#)

### **Controversial BLM Rock Springs Plan Could Devastate Tourism, Boosters Say**

The Bureau of Land Management's proposed plan for the 3.6 million acres in the Rock Springs area could devastate tourism in Sweetwater County, which generates millions in revenue and 1,400 local jobs, tourism booster claim.



[Mark Heinz](#)

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Many areas of the Red Desert in southwest Wyoming make up an outdoor recreation playground. (Wyoming Office of Tourism)

Sweetwater County tourism boosters have joined a chorus of voices coming out of southwest Wyoming opposing the Bureau of Land Management's preferred alternative for managing 3.6 million acres of public land, much of it in that county.

"After reviewing the plan, it is without reservation that the Sweetwater County Joint Travel and Tourism Board aligns strongly with our members of Congress, Governor Gordon, the Sweetwater County Commissioners, municipalities in the region, and many other valuable partners and stakeholders in

requesting that this draft be withdrawn,” the board states in a letter to BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning.

The letter was written and sent to address the board’s concerns over Alternative B, the BLM’s favored alternative for its Rock Springs region’s Resource Management Plan, Jenissa Meredith, president and CEO of the travel and tourism board, told Cowboy State Daily.

The banner features the logo for the Wyoming Department of Health and Human Services on the left, with the text "Promoting a barrier free, accessible voting experience" in blue. Below this is a disclaimer: "This publication was made possible by 100% federal funding support from the Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$141,043. These contents are solely the responsibility of the grantee. This information or queries and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by ACL, HHS, or the U.S. Government." To the right, there is a blue box with white text: "DIGNITY → PRIVACY" and "RESPECT → INDEPENDENCE". Below this is the slogan "Wyoming voting - where equality means accessibility" and a small graphic of a person at a voting station.

Offering another tourism perspective, the Rock Springs RMP might not have any direct effects on tourism in Natrona County, Amanda Sewell, the Business Development Coordinator for Visit Casper told Cowboy State Daily.

However, Sewell said she understands why the plan might not be welcomed in Sweetwater County if it could lead to a decline in tourism there.

### Millions Of Dollar At Stake

Tourism is big business in Sweetwater County, generating millions of dollars each year, according to the Sweetwater board’s letter.

“Visitor spending in Sweetwater County reached over \$160 million in 2022, supporting hundreds of local businesses and employing over 1,400 residents,” the board wrote. “The BLM Agency Preferred Alternative B, which would drastically restrict valid and existing rights, would have a devastating effect on tourism, economic development and resident quality of life.”

### No Local Cooperation

The tourism board’s sentiments echo those of the Sweetwater County commissioners who have also expressed dismay over the implications of the preferred Alternative B.

Sweetwater County Sheriff John Grossnickle recently told members of the Wyoming Legislature that if the RMP passes Alternative B, he won’t cooperate with federal agency in enforcing it.

The advertisement features a black background with a white excavator on the left. The main text reads "CALL 811 BEFORE YOU DIG" in large white letters. Below this is the text "Click to learn more." To the right are logos for "BH Black Hills Energy" and "811 Wyoming".

County Commissioner Taylor Jones told Cowboy State Daily that while it’s not the commission’s place to manage the sheriff, he personally supports Grossnickle’s stance.

The Sweetwater County tourism board also criticized the BLM for hosting “open house” meetings in Rock Springs and elsewhere offering information the RMP, but not allowing public comment during the meetings.

“Additionally, scheduling open houses and refusing to take verbal public comment at those meetings created a true sense of disregard for resident sentiment throughout the region,” the board stated.

Gov. Mark Gordon led a push — joined by the Sweetwater County Commission, tourism board and others — to extend the public comment period for the RMP, which was originally set to close Nov. 16. That effort was a success, [the BLM agreed to extend the comment period](#) until Jan. 17, 2024.

The draft RMP and a guide for filing comments [are available online](#).

### Just How Restrictive?

At the heart of the controversy over the draft RMP is the proposal that roughly half of the land in the Rock Springs area, 1.8 million acres, be designated as “areas of critical environmental concern” (ACES).



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Some have expressed concern that such a designation would severely limit public access. However, BLM officials recently told Cowboy State Daily that the agency has [no intention](#) of shutting down public access.

Sewell said that according to her understanding, ACES designation might not affect any current uses, although it might restrict further development in those places.

Some visitors might appreciate those lands being kept remote, she said.

Other alternatives for the RMP would allow for more energy development, which could influence tourism, but “I’m usure whether it would be negative or not,” she said.

Sewell added that she wanted to keep researching the RMP, and encouraged Wyomingites to take advantage of the extended public comment period.

“Conserving land is important for historical and geologic preservation; however, it will be good to hear public comments to gain perspective on how residents view the areas,” she said.