

**WTE column June 11, 2015. Editor's headline: "Buffalo Plan against Obama order"**  
**Casper Star Tribune of June 13, 2015: "Buffalo Plan and the threat of climate chaos"**

Thursday, May 28, 2015, was a day of celebration for Wyoming's Sage Grouse Implementation Team. On that day, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewel paid a visit to applaud the team's efforts and announce her collaboration in resource management plans that would protect the imperiled bird without listing it as endangered. The event took place at the Hereford Ranch, sanctuary to an amazing variety of birds.

For environmentalists, however, the day was far from celebratory. They arrived to take Secretary Jewel to task on the Bureau of Land Management's plans regarding federally-owned coal lands in the Powder River Basin. Inasmuch as the BLM functions under the Department of Interior, environmental groups have been hard at work lobbying Secretary Jewel for stricter coal-mining controls.

On the sage-grouse day, BLM released the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on its Buffalo Field Office Resource Management Plan (BFORMP). However innocuously titled, the plan details the leasing of more than ten billion tons of coal in the Powder River Basin over the next two decades. This, in addition to thousands of new oil and gas wells, all on the federal lands within the Powder River Basin. BLM's EIS states that it is keeping its coal leasing decisions of 2001, and that most new Buffalo coal leases would extend already-existing mining operations.

During their celebratory remarks, Secretary Jewel and Governor Mead kept emphasizing that "continued economic development" is necessary alongside species protection. Continued economic development, it appears, is double-speak for snubbing renewables in favor of continued, subsidized, fossil-fuel extraction.

Advocates have repeatedly urged the interior Department to bring BLM development plans in line with President Obama's executive emissions order. That order requires the federal government to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent by 2025 from 2008 levels. The presidential effort aims to bring our country into serious intentional climate-change discussions, which will prepare for the decisions expected to happen at the Paris meeting later this year. The BLM's pro-coal action goes the wrong direction. It's up to the Interior Department to revise the scheme.

It's "a crucial time to address questions around climate change and continued coal leasing," wrote Theo Spencer of the Natural Resources Defense Council in its online publication, "Switchboard." The Buffalo Plan constitutes a "10.2 billion ton gorilla in the room," he points out, which Interior Department officials have been doing their best to ignore. The plan's scheme is to pull from the ground "essentially all the remaining economically recoverable coal in the Powder River Basin in Wyoming."

The tactics will render the president's reductions all but meaningless, what with the "substantial emissions that will occur from the leasing, extraction, and combustion of coal, oil, and gas within the Buffalo planning area," writes Mr. Spence. Already the coal companies that mine federal land are sitting on "at least a decade's worth of stockpiles," observes Mr. Spence; thus, the Buffalo Plan makes no sense whatsoever. Further, it's out of step with President Obama's Clean Power Plan, the

goal of which is to cut U.S. carbon pollution emissions from existing coal plants 30 percent over 2005 levels by 2030.

Diana Best, Senior Coal Campaigner at Greenpeace, is equally alarmed. She attended the sage-grouse meeting to lodge her concerns with Secretary Jewel. “The BLM’s Buffalo plan urgently needs her attention,” Diana told me in the eco-friendly surroundings of Hereford Ranch.

Together with supporters from Powder River Basin Resource Council, Ms. Best has focused her efforts on Ms. Jewel for some time. At Hereford Ranch, she also approached BLM Director Neil Konze. After Secretary Jewel had finished praising Mr. Konze’s work on behalf of sage grouse, Ms. West buttonholed the man.

“Shouldn’t your Buffalo Plan include consideration of President Obama’s pledge to reduce carbon emissions?” she asked.

His answer was evasive. With interest in coal diminishing, he said, it’s possible that “not all” of what the plan covers will actually be extracted. Clearly, the threat of climate chaos does not enter his equation.

“How many times have we followed (Secretary Jewel) around the country to ask her these same questions,” Ms. Best later told me by email. “We have spoken directly to her in San Francisco, Florida, and New Orleans. We have stood outside her office in DC with large banners. We have flown an airship in Montana with a giant message. Again in Wyoming we confronted her about the conflict between President Obama's climate policy and the federal leasing policy.”

It seems bitter irony that an effort by state and federal agencies is underway on behalf of a vanishing bird, while both governments continue to exploit resources that imperil us all. “For humanity to have a chance at survival, the coal and other hydrocarbons on federal lands must remain in the ground,” Ms. Best reiterated. Her conclusion is right on the money.