Submitted via email to blm_ca_bkfo_oil_gas_update@blm.gov

Bakersfield Field Office
Bureau of Land Management
Attn: Bakersfield RMP Hydraulic Fracturing Analysis
3801 Pegasus Drive,
Bakersfield, CA 93308

Re: Notice of Intent for Potential Amendment to the Resource Management Plan for the Bakersfield Field Office, California, and To Prepare an Associated Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Sir/Madam:

Western Energy Alliance appreciates the opportunity to submit scoping comments on a potential amendment to the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) Bakersfield Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) and associated supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS). As BLM considers a supplemental review of the impacts of hydraulic fracturing in the planning area, it should consider additional information supporting the safety of the process that has become available since the most recent management plan was finalized. Any amendment to the Bakersfield RMP should incorporate this new information as further support for the management decisions in the existing plan.

Western Energy Alliance represents over 300 companies engaged in all aspects of environmentally responsible exploration and production of oil and natural gas across the West. The Alliance represents independents, the majority of which are small businesses with an average of fifteen employees.

In December 2014, BLM completed its most recent RMP amendment for the Bakersfield Field Office (2014 RMPA). Through that amendment process, BLM conducted an extensive study of the effects of hydraulic fracturing on the environment, and since the 2014 RMPA is less than four years old, the fluid minerals decisions therein properly document the effects of the process in the planning area.

BLM is undertaking the current review and potential RMP amendment pursuant to a settlement agreement in a case filed in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California challenging oil and natural gas leases issued under the 2014 RMPA. While we maintain our position that an SEIS was unnecessary to satisfy National Environmental Policy Act requirements for leasing in the Bakersfield Field Office, as argued in an amicus brief filed in a related lawsuit, we believe BLM can further buttress its decisions in the 2014 RMPA by referencing a study that was subsequently released by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in June 2015.
The 2015 EPA study concluded, based on the best available scientific evidence, that hydraulic fracturing has not led to widespread, systemic impacts on drinking water resources in the United States. That conclusion was reached after conducting the most comprehensive study of hydraulic fracturing to date, drawing from 3,700 sources of scientific information and producing 20 peer-reviewed research papers. EPA’s well-researched and documented study demonstrated that hydraulic fracturing is being done across the nation in a manner protective of water quality.

States have developed robust regulatory frameworks for the entire oil and natural gas development process, including hydraulic fracturing. EPA’s study examined the entire life-cycle of oil and natural gas development as it relates to the hydraulic fracturing process, beginning with water acquisition, followed by chemical mixing, well injection, flowback and produced water management, and lastly wastewater management and waste disposal.

Existing state and federal regulations are protective of water quality and regulators are continuously strengthening their rules. In addition, the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission (IOGCC) provides extensive support to state oil and gas commissions in the form of model regulation and other technical support, including review of state regulations. IOGCC enables sharing of innovative techniques and environmental protection strategies among states on various regulatory aspects such as chemical handling, well injections, flowback fluids and produced water, as well as wastewater management and waste disposal. The IOGCC is effective at supporting state regulatory processes and helping to continuously improve regulations.

In addition to overall process improvement, states are strengthening rules that specifically pertain to each aspect of the hydraulic fracturing life cycle. Well construction and wellbore integrity testing are already regulated effectively at the state level. States require a variety of measures to ensure wellbore integrity such as mechanical integrity testing; petrophysical and casing cement bond well logging, including for nearby wells; casing and cement standards; surface casing pressure monitoring during hydraulic fracturing operations, reporting of fluids being injected, and submittal of geologic and hydrological data. In addition, state regulatory agencies have the ability to witness well construction and completion activities and review records to ensure compliance with the well integrity rules.

As the EPA study demonstrates, hydraulic fracturing is a process that has been proven, through numerous studies and ongoing implementation, to be both safe and well-regulated. Furthermore, several independent studies have reached the same conclusion. Energy In Depth has compiled a compendium of studies of the fracking process that includes data from 23 peer-reviewed studies, 17 government health and regulatory agencies, and reports from 10 research institutions that demonstrate the safety and benefits of fracking. Studies were authored by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Carnegie Mellon, the Colorado Department of Public Health and
Environment (CDPHE), University of Texas, Stanford University, Yale University and many others.

In fact, the 2014 RMPA recognized this conclusion in its discussion of the study *An Independent Review of Scientific and Technical Information on Advanced Well Stimulation Technologies in California*, which it analyzed in the final EIS. Some of the key takeaways BLM identified in the report were:

- There are no publicly reported instances of potable water contamination from subsurface releases in California;
- Well stimulation technologies, as currently practiced in California, do not result in a significant increase in seismic hazard; and
- Overall, in California, for industry practice of today, the direct environmental impacts of well stimulation practice appear to be relatively limited.

Any RMP amendment and SEIS should simply incorporate EPA’s review as further support for the management actions outlined in the 2014 Plan and continue oil and natural gas leasing pursuant to that document.

Western Energy Alliance appreciates the opportunity to provide scoping comments on a potential amendment to the Bakersfield Resource Management Plan addressing the process of hydraulic fracturing. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Tripp Parks
Manager of Government Affairs