



Aubrey Dunn, State Land Commissioner
State of New Mexico

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State Land Commissioner Dunn suspends SLO's participation in Rio Grande Del Norte/Sabinoso Wilderness Land Exchange

SANTA FE, NM – State Land Commissioner Aubrey Dunn today announced that he is suspending State Land Office participation in the Rio Grande Del Norte/Sabinoso Wilderness State Land Exchange because of a lack of commitment from Commissioner of Public Lands candidate Stephanie Garcia Richard to pursue it, among other reasons.

The exchange would have seen NMSLO transfer 43,000 acres of state-owned surface and mineral estate within the monument and wilderness areas – 30 percent of which is unleased at this time – to the BLM while SLO would gain approximately 78,000 federal acres in Chaves, Colfax, Guadalupe, Lincoln, McKinley, Mora, Otero, Rio Arriba, San Juan, Sandoval, Santa Fe, Socorro, and Torrance Counties, which were more favorable for economic development.

In a July 18 letter to BLM State Director Aden Seidlitz, Commissioner Dunn detailed the reasons behind his decision to halt the agency's participation in the highly-anticipated exchange.

Noting that delays in federal contracting will prevent the exchange from being completed before he leaves office, Dunn said he cannot bind the next Commissioner to future payments nor to completing a land exchange – especially if they have expressed an unwillingness to commit to completing the project.

“My frustration is two-fold: first, BLM's authorization to proceed with the exchange was mired in the Trump administration's bureaucracy for months, which effectively pushed the project timeline beyond my term,” Commissioner Dunn said. “On top of that, Stephanie Garcia Richard indicated that she will not go forward with this exchange if she becomes the next Commissioner of Public Lands. This was a win-win exchange; unfortunately, convincing her otherwise has been a fruitless endeavor.”

Commissioner Dunn said that, despite his disappointment, he isn't necessarily closing the door on SLO's future involvement in the exchange. That involvement, however, will only happen if his successor determines that the exchange is worth pursuing.

“This agency and the BLM have invested significant time and resources toward this project – a project that would ultimately prove a benefit for the Trust. It would be a shame to have our hard work undone because of political whim,” Commissioner Dunn added. “But we are holding out hope that after the election in November, the Commissioner-elect sees the wisdom and value in this exchange and decides to move forward.”

Oil, gas, and mineral production, ranching and farming, and commercial development on State Trust Lands support public schools, seven universities, New Mexico Military Institute, New Mexico School for the Deaf, New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, three hospitals, correctional facilities, water conservation projects, and public building construction and repair. In fiscal year 2017, the State Land Office collected \$664 million from lease payments, oil and gas lease sale earnings, rights-of-way, permits, interest, fees, and oil, gas, and mineral royalties.