



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

October 16, 2015

Mr. Neil Kornze
Director
Bureau of Land Management
1849 C Street Northwest, Room 5665
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Kornze:

“Gov’t Tells Rancher His Land No Longer Belongs to Him.” “Land Grab.” These are not headlines in distant, autocratic dictatorships. These are headlines in Texas after a recent meeting where representatives from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) made clear that the federal government persists in its efforts to take control of land along the Texas-Oklahoma border — land that has been privately owned and managed for decades. I write for a third time to ask that you cease and desist this federal land grab.

As attorney general, I asked for clarification regarding the BLM’s claim of ownership of vast lands held by Texans along the Red River. My fellow Texans and I are still waiting for an answer. The BLM has yet to identify what land the federal government newly claims as its own. The BLM has yet to identify the legal basis for that claim. And the BLM has yet to identify the process by which Texans can protect their land and private property rights.

Texas will not wait for answers any longer.

The landowners along the Red River have lived and labored on this land for generations. The BLM now inexplicably seeks to take control of thousands of acres of private land for undetermined recreational activities. Throughout the process, the BLM has minimized the landowners’ grave and legitimate concerns, while providing no clarity regarding the authority for taking the land in the first place.

Explaining to landowners that the process is long and complex, that surveys will be done or that landowners will eventually be able to file a “color of title” lawsuit is neither solution nor solace. Instead, it is an illegal taking. These actions harm Texans now by clouding the title to the land their families have owned for generations. As you well know, the BLM’s actions prevent

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landowners from borrowing against the land to finance business operations or selling the land to new owners looking to cultivate their own economic freedom. But the implications of your actions are not merely financial. In many cases, your actions threaten to take the very homes above these Texans' heads.

Nearly two months ago, we received news of what appeared to be movement in a positive direction by your agency, when the BLM admitted that it had wrongly claimed ownership to nearly 100 acres along the Red River. Unfortunately, that admission came nearly 30 years after the United States first claimed ownership to the land — nearly 30 years after depriving a Texas family of their private property. Unfortunately, the realization of this “mistake” does not appear to have deterred BLM’s much larger land grab. As the old saying goes, “Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” But Texas isn’t going to let history repeat itself.

Our Constitution — the same Constitution you have taken an oath to uphold — rests on the principle that governments are created to protect private property owners’ rights, not destroy them. This principle is enshrined in the Fifth Amendment of our founding document. The BLM should demonstrate that the federal government still respects private property rights and end this unconscionable land grab.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Abbott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Greg Abbott
Governor

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