



## REQUEST FOR PUBLIC RECORDS

October 16, 2017

Public Information Officer  
Wyoming Environmental Quality Council  
122 West 25th Street  
Herschler Building, 1W, Room 1714  
Cheyenne, WY 82002

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL: [eqc-all@wyo.gov](mailto:eqc-all@wyo.gov)

### **RE: FOIA Request – Certain Agency Records re: Environmentalist Pressure Groups**

Freedom of Information Officer,

On behalf of the Energy & Environment Legal Institute (E&E Legal) please consider this request pursuant to the Wyoming Public Records Act, Wyo. Stat. § 16-4-201 et seq. We are a non-profit public policy and legal institute organized under section 501(c)3 of the federal tax code with research, legal, investigative journalism and publication functions, as well as a transparency initiative seeking public records relating to environmental and energy policy and how policymakers use public resources, all of which include broad dissemination of public information obtained under open records and freedom of information laws. We further note that E&E Legal is also a media outlet for purposes of open record requests (see, *infra*).

We write in the context of recent developments widely covered by media outlets, including national media outlets, which involves an issue of significant public interest. Specifically the issue of Wyoming's consideration of, and rejection of, the first mining permit of

its kind in approximately four decades, as new mines open elsewhere in the country yet other regions continue to struggle under the effects of the widely reported “war on coal”.<sup>1</sup>

Specifically, and also bearing in mind the May 22, 1985 EQC Order,<sup>2</sup> please provide us, or inform us within seven working days of the unavailability of, copies of all records as follow:

1) all work-related email, instant messaging (whether SMS, WhatsApp, Signal and/or other), and faxed and other hard copy correspondence (herein, “correspondence”), including attachments, which were sent to or from or which copy (whether as cc: or bcc) Jim Ruby, Executive Secretary of EQC @ jruby@wyo.gov or any other account/ address used at any time for work-related correspondence during the period covered by this request, which were also sent to, from, or copy (whether as cc: or bcc:) i) any employee, officer, or member of the Powder River Basin Resource Council, *or* ii) employees, officers, or members of Clean Energy Action.

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<sup>1</sup> See Wyoming Rejects Mine Permit, by Dylan Brown, E&E News reporter at <https://www.eenews.net/eenewspm/2017/10/13/stories/1060063639>

<sup>2</sup> Order, “Service of Documents Upon Members of the Environmental Quality Council”, Before the Environmental Quality Council, State of Wyoming, Signed by Harold L. Bergman, Chairman and available at <http://tinyurl.com/yaegsjea>. Under this Order “All documents to be delivered to the Environmental Quality Council must be delivered to the office of the Environmental Quality Council at Emerson Building, Room 304, 2001 Capitol Avenue, Cheyenne, WY, 82002” (Order, ¶ 1).

Bearing in mind this Order ¶ 3, this contemplates all documents including but not limited to correspondence, public comments or legal analyses. Text messages, other instant messages whether sent by text, SMS, or encrypted applications such as WhatsApp and Signal also are correspondence and therefore documents, for these purposes.

Bearing in mind this Order, this also contemplates all copies of all “documents delivered to the Environmental Quality Council”, and all “documents delivered to individual Council members”, and copies of all “prior approval from the Council’s office received for direct mailing” of any record to any individual Council member.

**Responsive records will be dated from January 1, 2017 to the date you process this request.** We specifically exclude from this request as non-responsive all records which merely forward news stories, clippings or reports with no comment or with no substantive comment (e.g., “FYI” is not substantive).

Our experience to date with Wyoming’s Public Records Act and its above-cited time limit is not an inspiring one, with our two previous requests to a state agency also seeking records relating to state official relationships with environmentalist pressure groups still languishing more than two years after we submitted them. As such, to avoid such violation of the legislature’s intent again please note our intention to protect and pursue all administrative rights and pursue available remedies in the event we are unable to obtain timely compliance with state offices’ statutory obligations.

This request arises in the context of recent developments, including national media reports, involving an issue of significant public interest, specifically the issue of Wyoming’s deliberations.

The requested records, all of which are work-related and/or inherently were created using state resources, also appear to be the only way for the public to obtain this information.

In addition to coverage of its FOI work in print publications, E&E Legal regularly disseminates its findings on broadcast media. E&E Legal is also regularly cited in newspapers and trade publications for its open records efforts.

We see some state offices set forth charges for “hard copies” of records. We note that printing paper copies or records whose native format is electronic is unnecessary, and as such

generally not a “reasonable fee” per 16-4-204 given today’s technology and particularly given many or possibly all of the records sought in this request are held in electronic format.

Nonetheless, as we owe the cost of duplicating those and any other records in our requested format (electronic), we are willing to pay up to \$200 in for materials required to duplicate the above-described records, appropriate time to do so and postage costs.

Please contact the undersigned to provide a cost estimate if “[t]he reasonable costs of producing a copy of the public record” are expected to exceed that amount. If such costs exceed \$200, undersigned hereby notify DEQ that they may, at their option, choose instead exercise their right to inspect records in person pursuant to Wyo. Stat. § 16-4-203.

We note the Wyoming Supreme Court has specifically required state agencies to provide as much non-exempt information as possible when answering Public Records Act requests, rather than withholding entire documents or categories of documents. *Allsop v. Cheyenne Newspapers*, 39 P.3d 1092 (Wyo.2002). “Put another way, the WPRA creates a presumption that the denial of inspection is contrary to public policy, and therefore places ‘the burden of proof upon the custodian to show that the exercise of his discretion does not run afoul of statutory limitations in any particular instance where custodial withdrawal is effected.’” *Powder River Basin Res. Council v. Wyoming Oil & Gas Conservation Comm’n*, 2014 Wy. 37, quoting *Sheridan Newspapers, Inc. v. Sheridan*, 660 P.2d 785, 795-96 (Wy. 1983).

We also ask that you also consider waiving fees on the basis that release of these records is in the public interest, as demonstrated in part by the extent and content of the related media coverage of late, prompting this request. We further note that E&E Legal is also a media outlet

for these purposes, both as concluded by, e.g., the federal government<sup>3</sup> and by virtue of E&E Legal's experience serving as a regular source of public information and adding substantive editorial comment about this information to numerous national (and/or local) media outlets but also applies substantive editorial input in its own publications disseminating public information. Requesters point to E&E Legal's website for examples of their reports and publications (*see e.g.*, <https://eelegal.org> and <https://eelegal.org/legal-letters/>). and coverage of their work (<https://eelegal.org/category/press/>).

Respectfully submitted,



Craig E. Richardson  
Executive Director, E&E Legal

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<sup>3</sup> *See e.g.*, Securities and Exchange Commission Request No. 15-01086-FOIA, Department of Energy FOIA HQ-2015-00479-F.