Outdoor groups "seek a balance"

TV sportsman Tony Dean joins an effort addressing hunting vs. oil and gas development.

By Andy Vuong and Steve Lipsher
The Denver Post
Article Last Updated: 04/16/2008 11:01:14 PM MDT

A high-profile group of sportsmen announced a public campaign Wednesday to lobby elected officials and land managers to "seek a balance" between oil and gas development and outdoor recreation.

"Oil and gas development is damaging a lot of fish and wildlife habitat, and when that happens it compromises our abilities as sportsmen to hunt and fish on public lands," said Tony Dean, host of a popular outdoorsmen television show.

The group would like to see significant environmental safeguards in place, he said.

"About 27 million acres of big-game habitat have been leased for energy development," Dean said.

Trout Unlimited's Chris Wood called the grass-roots lobbying effort a "last resort" because sportsmen have not been heard in discussions over oil and gas leasing.

Also, a new report shows that Colorado oil, gas and mining companies pay the seventh-lowest tax rate among firms in 10 Western states.

In 2006, oil, gas and mining companies in Colorado paid $206.8 million in taxes on resources valued at $11.3 billion, for a tax rate of 1.8 percent. Companies in Alaska paid 11.2 percent, the highest among states in the report, conducted by Chicago research firm Center on Work and Community Development. A coalition of environmental and conservation organizations commissioned the report.
The other states are Arizona, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming.

Oil and gas firms in Colorado can deduct 87.5 percent of their county property taxes from their severance tax, thus lowering the amount of tax paid for the resources drilled. The Colorado Oil and Gas Association declined comment.

Andy Vuong: 303-954-1209 or avuong@denverpost.com

New group for habitat

By Cory Hatch, Jackson Hole, Wyoming
Date: April 17, 2008

Organizers of a new sportsmen group say it’s time for hunters and anglers to get proactive about protecting fish and big-game habitat from energy development across the Western states.

On Wednesday, members of the National Wildlife Federation, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and Trout Unlimited announced the formation of the new group, Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development.

Group organizers say they will attempt to preserve land for hunting and fishing by influencing laws and policies in Western states. The group plans a symposium May 21 to 24 with researchers and policy makers in Grand Teton National Park in an effort to come up with specific “science based” recommendations for the next presidential administration and the next Congress, according to Trout Unlimited spokesman Chris Hunt. Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal is expected to speak at the event.

Hunt said he and his fellow sportsmen have “stood by and gritted our teeth” as the oil and gas industry has ruined fisheries and caused declines in big-game herds.

“We want to find a way to develop oil and gas resources in the West without continuing to tarnish the places that hunters and anglers hold dear,” Hunt said. “Habitat has just gone to pot because of all the roads and industrial-grade activity that comes with oil and gas development.”

As part of their campaign, the group developed a sportsmen’s “bill of rights.” It includes statements such as, “Our hunting and fishing heritage shall not be jeopardized by oil and gas development that fails to account for the future, long-term impacts to fish, wildlife and water” and, “The oil and gas industry shall pay its fair share of the cost for permitting and habitat restoration on public lands that are drilled for oil and gas.”
Hunt said Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development is different from other campaigns, such as Sportsmen for the Wyoming Range, because those efforts adopt a defensive posture with regard to proposed drilling in one particular place.

“We’ve got to stop being defensive,” Hunt said. “There has to be a way for us to get at the oil and gas without trashing the places we go to hunt and fish. There has to be a way for us as sportsmen to deliver a message to the president and to Congress.”

Hunt said the promise of domestic fossil-fuel development hasn’t helped American consumers.

“I drive a truck to go fishing, but the ramp-up in domestic energy production hasn’t done a darn thing to alleviate the price at the pump or the price it costs to heat our house,” he said.

“We support oil and gas development in the West, to a point,” he said. “We have a heritage out here in the West that we’re fond of. Oil and gas development in the last decade or so is changing the landscape, and not for the better.”

Gary Amerine, an outfitter in Daniel, said he joined the group because the oil and gas industry is threatening his livelihood. He said his clients on summer pack trips in the Wyoming Range are starting to notice how energy development has damaged the landscape.

“I’m starting to hear comments on air quality,” he said. “We used to be able to see seven mountain ranges from the top of the Wyoming Range. Now there’s days on the Wyoming Range that you can’t see the Wind River Range, which is only 30 miles away.”

This week, Amerine is in Washington, D.C., testifying before the House Committee on Small Business.

“We are representing renewable, sustainable types of businesses,” he said. “Energy development can be here one day and gone the next.”

For information on Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development, visit www.sportsmen4responsibleenergy.org.

Sportsmen keep eyes on energy companies

By DAVE BUCHANAN
The Daily Sentinel
Wednesday, April 16, 2008

Saying it shouldn’t take an act of Congress to protect valuable wildlife resources across the West from development, a coalition of sportsmen and conservation groups Wednesday announced the formation of Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development.
Key to a campaign aimed at bringing balance between the demands of energy development and the preservation of wildlands and wildlife habitat is the Sportsmen’s Bill of Rights, a 10-point declaration that outlines the rights hunters and anglers can expect when pursuing their activities on public lands.

“Energy development is becoming more and more of a hot-button issue” across the West, said Shoren Brown, campaign manager for the new sportsmen’s advocacy group. “There’s a rising chorus of voices and a strong desire to see change in how energy development is being done.”

Heading the campaign are the conservation groups Trout Unlimited, National Wildlife Federation and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.

Chris Wood, chief operating officer for Trout Unlimited, said the “Forest Service and (Bureau of Land Management’s) usual order (of energy development) is lease first, ask about water and wildlife next.

“But it shouldn’t take an act of Congress to ... ensure a place like the Roan Plateau is protected from energy development,” Wood said.

Outfitter Gary Amerine, owner of Greys River Trophies of Daniel, Wyo., said energy development in the Bridger-Teton National Forest has reduced the mule deer herd by half in some areas.

Well-known television and radio personality Tony Dean of “Tony Dean’s Outdoors” said a recent flyover of Wyoming left him “shocked and appalled” at the amount of development impacting public lands.

Wood said the campaign “has become a position of last resort for us.”

Saying Trout Unlimited values long-standing partnerships with federal land-management agencies, he said he felt as though sportsmen weren’t being listened to when it comes to energy decisions.

Relying solely on legislation to slow development “demonstrates that something is fundamentally broken within the system,” Wood said. “It shouldn’t take a new piece of legislation to responsibly manage a landscape.”

More information about Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development is available at www.sportsmen4responsibleenergy.org.

•

E-mail Dave Buchanan at dbuchanan@gjds.com.
New group seeks to define balance

Seems like everywhere I go, people are dropping the big B-word.

Balance, balance, balance - I hear it all the time.

We need balance...

There's got to be balance...

Balancing habitat and wildlife with energy is ...

We're not against drilling, we just want balance...

It's all got to be balanced...

It's all the craze here in Wyoming. If you can say you want balance between energy development and wildlife, well you must be environmentally conscious, which if you haven't noticed is tooootally in style.

Even companies like Ultra Petroleum, Questar and Shell are saying it. They, of course, hire deep-voiced narrators to say it for them in low, soothing tones, but it's all the same: ultra trendy.

I, too, am totally, environmentally "in vogue" as I have found ways to work it into both academic and casual conversation.

Balance, balance, balance, balance, balance.

Sigh.

It's hard being this cool.

It's too bad none of us really knows what it means.

We all talk a big game, but none of us really know what balance looks like in practice.

Maybe it's time we figure that out...
This week, a group of conservation heavy hitters will unveil a group that might be able to answer that question.

The group, Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development, is the brainchild of the same people who created Sportsmen for the Wyoming Range and includes pre-existing groups such as Trout Unlimited, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and the National Wildlife Federation.

It is a diverse bunch of entities, coming together to form one cohesive voice in the negotiation between energy needs and the protection of habitat and wildlife. Rather than go to Congress every time they want to preserve a small chunk of land, they decided to attack the problem at its core.

In short, they are trying to define balance.

From the looks of it, we're going to need it.

An analysis by The Wilderness Society estimated 126,000 new oil and gas wells across the west over the next 20 years. That's double the current total.

Wyoming leads that pack with 58,209, which in my mind is astounding. We whine and moan about the current pace of development, but unless the system is fixed, we can't even begin to fathom the impacts we might endure as a state.

Shoren Brown, campaign manager for Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development, says sportsmen are going to have to create the roadmap.

"It's going to be up to the sportsmen to figure out a balanced approach and what that means and then advocate for it," he says.

The group will hold a symposium in Grand Teton National Park in May to gather the "best and brightest" minds in one place to let them duke out the issue. The hope is to come up with some sort of solution that will appease all sides - at least a little.

Brown says sportsmen are in a unique position to change policy.

And he's right.

Sportsmen carry two things that politicians value: votes and money.

A report by the Congressional Sportsmen Foundation estimated there were nearly 40 million sportsmen of voting age. Within that group, nearly 8 in 10 hunters have voted in every presidential election and 6 in 10 hunters have voted in non-presidential elections.

But it's not just votes. They control dollars, too.

The report found that hunters and anglers contribute about $76 billion to the economy, supporting about 1.6 million jobs.
With that kind of power, it's a wonder something like this hasn't come about sooner.

It's time for the cool kids to stop calling for balance and to try to decide what that actually means.

Shauna Stephenson is the outdoors editor at the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle. You can reach her at 702 W. Lincolnway, Cheyenne, WY 82001, by phone at (307) 633-3186 or attsstephenson@wyomingnews.com

**Sportsmen form new group to address energy development**

ASSOCIATED PRESS
6:47 a.m. April 17, 2008

JACKSON, Wyo. – The organizers of a new sportsmen group say it's time for hunters and anglers to get more aggressive about protecting fishing waters and big-game habitat from energy development across the Western states.

Members of the National Wildlife Federation, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and Trout Unlimited on Wednesday announced the formation of the new group. It's called Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development.

Trout Unlimited spokesman Chris Hunt says that the group plans a meeting next month at Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. The group plans to draft science-based recommendations for the next presidential administration and the next Congress.

**Sportsmen form new group to address energy development**

ASSOCIATED PRESS
6:47 a.m. April 17, 2008

JACKSON, Wyo. – The organizers of a new sportsmen group say it's time for hunters and anglers to get more aggressive about protecting fishing waters and big-game habitat from energy development across the Western states.
Members of the National Wildlife Federation, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and Trout Unlimited on Wednesday announced the formation of the new group. It's called Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development.

Trout Unlimited spokesman Chris Hunt says that the group plans a meeting next month at Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. The group plans to draft science-based recommendations for the next presidential administration and the next Congress.
JACKSON, Wyo. – The organizers of a new sportsmen group say it's time for hunters and anglers to get more aggressive about protecting fishing waters and big-game habitat from energy development across the Western states.

Members of the National Wildlife Federation, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and Trout Unlimited on Wednesday announced the formation of the new group. It's called Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development.

Trout Unlimited spokesman Chris Hunt says that the group plans a meeting next month at Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. The group plans to draft science-based recommendations for the next presidential administration and the next Congress.

Story available at http://www.billingsgazette.net/articles/2008/04/17/news/state/24-energyissues.txt

Wildlife groups take on energy issues

By BRETT FRENCH
Of The Gazette Staff

Backed by a 10-point Sportsmen's Bill of Rights, hunters and anglers are uniting to lobby for responsible energy development in the West.

"Everyone is looking for a way forward in the debate about how we continue to drill for oil and gas and protect wildlife at the same time," Mike Dombeck, former chief of the U.S. Forest Service said in a statement. "Sportsmen are providing solutions."

Sportsmen United for Responsible Energy Development announced the bill of rights Wednesday. Partners include Trout Unlimited, the National Wildlife Federation and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.

"I think it's a great idea," said Herb Stoick, president of the Laurel Rod and Gun Club.

"As sportsmen and recreationists, we have to stand up for our rights. Once some of that land is gone, it's gone for our use."

Montana hunters and anglers have spoken out when energy development proposed on federal lands threatened wildlife habitat and fisheries. Last year, sportsmen rallied to protect
the upper Beaverhead River drainage in southwestern Montana from oil and gas leasing. The river is a prized trout fishery.

"We can't be fractionalized," Stoick said. "If we don't start standing up together, we won't have the power to do anything."

According to its Web site, Sportsmen United for Responsible Energy Development is working to "strike a balance between energy development and conservation in the West by reforming the laws, regulations, and policies that ensure respect for the traditions of the West." The group says 126,000 new gas wells are set for production across 26 million acres of Bureau of Land Management acreage in the West. The Sportsmen's Bill of Rights includes:

• The public lands that hunters and anglers depend upon shall remain in the public's hands for the use of future generations.

• Hunters and anglers shall have a voice in decisions affecting oil and gas development on public lands.

• Public lands shall be managed for many uses, including hunting and fishing. Although the coalition involves national groups, they rely on local hunting and fishing clubs such as the one in Laurel for support.

"We used to be just a quiet little club," Stoick said. "But we are trying to get our heads out of the sand. A few of us decided we need to stick up for what we have or we won't have anything left."

Contact Brett French at french@billingsgazette.com or at 657-1387.
"Everyone is looking for a way forward in the debate about how we continue to drill for oil and gas and protect wildlife at the same time," Mike Dombeck, former chief of the U.S. Forest Service said in a statement. "Sportsmen are providing solutions."

Sportsmen United for Responsible Energy Development announced the bill of rights Wednesday. Partners include Trout Unlimited, the National Wildlife Federation and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.

"I think it's a great idea," said Herb Stoick, president of the Laurel Rod and Gun Club. "As sportsmen and recreationists, we have to stand up for our rights. Once some of that land is gone, it's gone for our use."

Montana hunters and anglers have spoken out when energy development proposed on federal lands threatened wildlife habitat and fisheries. Last year, sportsmen rallied to protect the upper Beaverhead River drainage in southwestern Montana from oil and gas leasing. The river is a prized trout fishery.

"We can't be fractionalized," Stoick said. "If we don't start standing up together, we won't have the power to do anything."

According to its Web site, Sportsmen United for Responsible Energy Development is working to "strike a balance between energy development and conservation in the West by reforming the laws, regulations, and policies that ensure respect for the traditions of the West." The group says 126,000 new gas wells are set for production across 26 million acres of Bureau of Land Management acreage in the West.

The Sportsmen's Bill of Rights includes:

• The public lands that hunters and anglers depend upon shall remain in the public's hands for the use of future generations.

• Hunters and anglers shall have a voice in decisions affecting oil and gas development on public lands.

• Public lands shall be managed for many uses, including hunting and fishing. Although the coalition involves national groups, they rely on local hunting and fishing clubs such as the one in Laurel for support.

"We used to be just a quiet little club," Stoick said. "But we are trying to get our heads out of the sand. A few of us decided we need to stick up for what we have or we won't have anything left."

Contact Brett French at french@billingsgazette.com or at 657-1387.
Wildlife groups take on energy issues

By BRETT FRENCH
Of The Gazette Staff

Backed by a 10-point Sportsmen's Bill of Rights, hunters and anglers are uniting to lobby for responsible energy development in the West.

"Everyone is looking for a way forward in the debate about how we continue to drill for oil and gas and protect wildlife at the same time," Mike Dombeck, former chief of the U.S. Forest Service said in a statement. "Sportsmen are providing solutions."

Sportsmen United for Responsible Energy Development announced the bill of rights Wednesday. Partners include Trout Unlimited, the National Wildlife Federation and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.

"I think it's a great idea," said Herb Stoick, president of the Laurel Rod and Gun Club. "As sportsmen and recreationists, we have to stand up for our rights. Once some of that land is gone, it's gone for our use."

Montana hunters and anglers have spoken out when energy development proposed on federal lands threatened wildlife habitat and fisheries. Last year, sportsmen rallied to protect the upper Beaverhead River drainage in southwestern Montana from oil and gas leasing. The river is a prized trout fishery.

"We can't be fractionalized," Stoick said. "If we don't start standing up together, we won't have the power to do anything."

According to its Web site, Sportsmen United for Responsible Energy Development is working to "strike a balance between energy development and conservation in the West by reforming the laws, regulations, and policies that ensure respect for the traditions of the West." The group says 126,000 new gas wells are set for production across 26 million acres of Bureau of Land Management acreage in the West.

The Sportsmen's Bill of Rights includes:

• The public lands that hunters and anglers depend upon shall remain in the public's hands for the use of future generations.
• Hunters and anglers shall have a voice in decisions affecting oil and gas development on public lands.

• Public lands shall be managed for many uses, including hunting and fishing. Although the coalition involves national groups, they rely on local hunting and fishing clubs such as the one in Laurel for support.

"We used to be just a quiet little club," Stoick said. "But we are trying to get our heads out of the sand. A few of us decided we need to stick up for what we have or we won't have anything left."

Contact Brett French at french@billingsgazette.com or at 657-1387.
Copyright © The Billings Gazette, a division of Lee Enterprises.

Cost of drilling: Wells threaten tourism, hunting and natural beauty

Tribune Editorial

Salt Lake Tribune
Article Last Updated: 05/24/2008 12:04:30 PM MDT

New gas and oil wells are sprouting all over Utah and bunches of new leases are being sold in record numbers. Unprecedented financial returns make exploration and production of both commodities increasingly attractive to the extractive industries.

The Bush administration's drive to drill, regardless of the social and environmental consequences, has resulted in more than 25 million acres of the Mountain West being leased for gas and oil drilling, 3.9 million of those acres in Utah.

A new Interior Department study advocates developing still more wells, even on land currently deemed too sensitive for drilling. We're talking about oil and gas in amounts that do not begin to justify the long-term damage that piping them out of the ground would cause.

The cost of scattershot drilling on public lands, weighed against the loss of other natural resources, should not be underestimated. Think scenic vistas, wildlife, clean water and clean
air, and their benefit to our tourism-based economy. Our attention, and taxpayer support, should go instead to renewable energy sources that offer a better long-term benefit to Americans.

The administration's drilling craze goes hand-in-hand with its failure/refusal to develop the renewables that will help this country wean itself from the carbon-based fuels that are sapping the economy, holding the U.S. hostage to oil-producing autocracies and driving global warming.

In Utah, we've experienced the consequences of boom-bust cycles when the price of oil has shot up, then retreated. This time, the bust may come, not so much from a drastic drop in prices but in losses of tourism profits and a less-appealing quality of life as oil and gas companies tear up the landscape.

Wildlife is threatened by the recent drilling frenzy, including some threatened species. Roads, drilling rigs and equipment force deer off their usual range. As a result, many of them die or are unable to reproduce.

Fish, too, are damaged, along with the scenery that brings people here, when roads are bulldozed through pristine areas, sedimentation increases, forests are cut and water tables dry up.

To see a dramatic example of drilling's effects on wildlife, take a look at Pinedale, Wyo., the site of a boom in natural gas drilling and exploration a decade ago. Pinedale saw a 46 percent decrease in mule deer from 2001 to 2005.

The same could happen here if we aren't vigilant. Already, drilling threatens the Book Cliffs, a popular hunting ground, and Strawberry Reservoir, a blue-ribbon fishery.

The Bureau of Land Management should demand that each energy developer show how it will mitigate the effects of drilling on fish, wildlife and tourism before the BLM issues a permit. State wildlife agencies should monitor where leases are being sold.

Tourism, hunting and our unmatched landscapes are too important to Utah's long-term economic health to sacrifice on the altar of energy production.

---

Sportsmen say deck tilts in favor of development
By CHRIS MERRILL  
*Star-Tribune environment reporter*

JACKSON -- The order of the day for participants in a sportsmen-sponsored symposium here Thursday was working for the cause of taking the Wyoming Range off of the table for future oil and gas development.

But the 170 or so people taking part in the Responsible Energy Development Symposium at Jackson Lake Lodge said their intent wasn't to vilify the energy industry, which they acknowledged has been the key reason for the Cowboy State's economic resurgence in recent years.

They said they're simply seek a balance between energy and economic development and the preservation of what makes Wyoming precious.  
"We have a chance to do something special, before it's too late," said John Turner of Moose, former Republican Wyoming legislative leader and former director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Who would ever have believed that we'd have ozone warnings in the Upper Green River? And who'd ever believe that we'd have protests in that community?"

The symposium was organized by Trout Unlimited and Sportsmen for Responsible Development in response to Wyoming's ongoing energy boom, which the participating groups consider a threat to the future of some of Wyoming's most hallowed hunting, fishing and recreation lands. This meeting came the day after Bush administration officials released a report indicating that huge amounts of America's oil and gas reserves on public lands are inaccessible to producers, and they argued for fewer restrictions to domestic development of fossil fuels.

Turner said he thinks it is possible -- by taking a bigger-picture, more comprehensive approach to resource management -- to both encourage energy development and protect wildlife and other natural resources at the same time. He called for a new approach to oil and gas development that values resources such as healthy wildlife and hunting and fishing opportunities as much as it values fuel resources. And he indicated that a change in philosophy, at the federal level, is in order.

"I submit that the record is not good. It's not a record that inspires confidence," Turner said. "We need more science, and better science. We simply can't continue to wing it. We simply can't have BLM [personnel] hired to do biology, shackled to their desks, required to shuttle permits out the door all day."

The federal process for governing energy development needs to be "more transparent," he said, and there needs to be an emphasis on building partnerships among all interested parties.

"We need better leadership. We need people to stand up and simply start doing the right thing," Turner said. "We need more spirituality. I'm not talking about religion, although that plays a part -- I'm talking about making moral decisions. I'm talking about a community
taking responsibility for its actions. Finding common ground, showing respect for one another and making decisions based on shared values."

Turner saluted U.S. Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., for his efforts to keep the Wyoming Range offlimits to future oil and gas drilling, calling it an important cause.

"What else would bring craggy old ranchers together with cranky rednecks and self-proclaimed tree-huggers?" Turner said.

Losing the "home place"

Sportsmen for Responsible Development is a coalition of about 30 hunters and anglers groups and more than 60 trade unions, and its chief cause is to see that Barrasso's legislation, called the Wyoming Range Legacy Act, wins approval in the Senate and is eventually enacted by Congress and signed by the president.

Barrasso introduced the legislation in October 2007. It recently passed committee is waiting for a hearing on the Senate floor.

If the bill comes to fruition, it will allow all current energy development to continue, but it will stop all future oil and gas drilling and will call for a mechanism by which private interests could negotiate and buy existing, valid leases from the leaseholders.

Walt Gasson, executive director of the Wyoming Wildlife Federation, said that on a personal level, protecting the Wyoming Range has to do with protecting his and his family's "home place." He said the same is true for many Wyomingites.

"A home place is where your kids get dirty and your soul gets clean," Gasson said.

He said it would be unconscionable if Wyoming hunters and anglers allowed the Wyoming Range to become industrialized by oil and gas development.

"What can we do as hunters and anglers?" Gasson asked the audience. "We can get our shiny behinds off the couch and engage on this issue."

Hunters and anglers must reclaim their roles as "stewards" of Wyoming's natural resources, Gasson said. "Unless sportsmen are involved, we will lose the home place," he said.

Tom Reed of Trout Unlimited agreed. He cited an old Wyoming catch phrase to help make his point.

"Back in the early '90s I remember the slogan, 'Wyoming is what America was,'" Reed said. "You don't hear that anymore. Things have changed here. So I'd like to update that slogan to something like this: "The Wyoming Range is what Wyoming was."

Real compromise?
Several of Thursday's speakers emphasized the importance of creating partnerships with industry in order to find common ground, but when it comes to the issue of the Wyoming Range, that spirit doesn't seem to pervade, an industry spokesman said Thursday.

"So far there has been no compromise. We asked for areas along the front range [of the Wyoming Range] and we did not get any of it," said Bruce Hinchey, president Petroleum Association of Wyoming. "We're not talking about drilling the entire range. We're talking about pockets of drilling, mostly along the front range."

For Hinchey, taking 1.2 million acres off the table for energy development in one sweeping action doesn't seem to provide much compromise.

As for the idea of negotiated buyouts for undeveloped, valid leases, Hinchey said it might work, although he's unclear as to how the value of those leases could be determined.

Because the gas resource is potentially bountiful and highly concentrated, those leases could conceivably be very expensive, he said.

Regardless, and contrary to claims made at the symposium Thursday, it is possible to mix hunting and drilling, Hinchey said. The interests of sportsmen are shared, he said, by most people involved in the energy industry.

"I'm a sportsman," Hinchey said. "I like to hunt and fish. And most of the people who work in this industry like to hunt and fish. We're going to make sure things are done right."

Gov. criticizes Forest

By Cory Hatch  
Jackson Hole, Wyoming  
Date: May 24, 2008

Wyoming Governor Dave Freudenthal reiterated his criticism of Bridger-Teton National Forest officials Friday for allowing an energy company undo influence in a process that would allow oil and gas leases in the Wyoming Range.

Talking before the conservation group Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development in Grand Teton National Park, Freudenthal also emphasized the need for compromise when it comes to development of coal, natural gas and wind energy.
In April, Freudenthal denounced Bridger-Teton National Forest officials for allowing Stanley Energy, Inc. to participate in meetings on an environmental impact statement to determine whether 44,700 acres of contested energy leases should be reissued.

Stanley Energy not only participated in the meetings, but even hosted one at the Holland and Hart, LCC law offices in Cheyenne. The other meetings were conducted over the telephone.

Stanley Energy also approved the selection of the contractor that will write the document and is paying for the analysis, which is expected to cost between $250,000 and $500,000.

Bridger-Teton officials subsequently admitted to an inappropriate relationship with Stanley Energy, but said they would go forward with the document despite the governor’s calls for a new analysis.

While responding to questions after his speech, Freudenthal said the EIS is one example of how the Bush Administration is trying to rush forward with energy leases before leaving office next January.

“This EIS on the 44,000 acres is nothing more than ‘let’s get this done while we’re still in power,’” he said, directly addressing Bridger-Teton forest supervisor Kniffy Hamilton, who attended the speech. “It’s not a terribly rational decision.”

In the Wyoming Range, Freudenthal also urged conservation groups to consider a proposal for directional drilling that would allow energy companies to drill seven to eight miles into areas that would be protected from surface energy development.

“Only one mile inside a withdrawal area doesn’t make any sense to me,” Freudenthal said. “[Seven to eight miles with no surface occupancy] seems to be a good compromise.”

Still, the governor said efforts in Washington by U.S. Senator John Barrasso to protect the Wyoming Range have, so far, been met with success. “The Wyoming Range is one that I think we’ve got a pretty good shot at,” he said.

Freudenthal urged conservationists to take a realistic approach when it comes to wind power, saying that more transmission lines are needed across the state in order to harvest Wyoming’s vast wind resources. “You have people saying, ‘we don’t want any power lines,’” he said. “But the wind is where the wind is.”

The governor also said conservation groups to take a more active role in the process. “If you want to affect things, you’re going to have to get in the arena,” he said. “You can’t just sit here in the stands in Jackson Hole.”

Freudenthal chided meeting organizers for not including any industry representatives in the symposium. “If you’re going to talk about responsible energy development, you’ve got to have more players at the table,” he said. “If you’re serious about it, you’ve got to have a conversation.”
Speakers call for better planning

By CHRIS MERRILL
Star-Tribune environment reporter

JACKSON -- Oil and gas development in Wyoming has been planned in a "piecemeal" fashion thus far, sometimes on a well-by-well basis, biologists and conservationists argued Friday.

Future, more responsible development calls for a much broader, science-based approach, they said.

Day two of the Responsible Energy Development Symposium, spearheaded by Trout Unlimited, featured presentations and discussions on reducing harm to wildlife and other natural resources, and reclaiming wild habitat during and after drilling and extraction is through.

The three-day gathering at Jackson Lake Lodge has drawn more than 180 participants so far. It concludes today with an all-day field trip to the Jonah and Pinedale Anticline natural gas fields in the Upper Green River Valley.

The premise of the second day of speeches and discussions was that further energy development throughout the West is inevitable and necessary, but it can be better planned and done more responsibly than it has been in the past.
Hunters and anglers can help to take a leadership role in deciding what responsible development means, speakers argued.

"When you say you want a balance between development and wildlife, what specifically are you trying to balance?" asked Joe Kiesecker, ecologist and director of science for the Nature Conservancy.

A necessary step is to identify a "conservation portfolio," which is simply a catalog of all the animals, plants, habitats, migration routes and whatever else is deemed important to protect, he said.

Kiesecker suggested that scientists, sportsmen and state and federal officials start thinking in terms of "eco-regions," or something similar, instead of limiting considerations to individual fields, counties or states when drawing up development plans and mitigation efforts.

An eco-region such as the Wyoming Basin is a land mass that has a distinct climate, vegetation and wildlife diversity. It is important to use some frame of reference similar to this, Kiesecker said, because, for example, "Mule deer don't care whether they're in Wyoming or Colorado."

Kevin McAleese, vice president of the Sand County Foundation, which is part of the Cooperative Sagebrush Initiative, echoed Kiesecker's points. He said it's time to move beyond a "piecemeal" approach to leasing and drilling approvals, and start planning and mitigating impacts on the scale of ecosystems.

McAleese also urged those in attendance to decide where they believe it is important to draw the line with development.

"We as sportsmen need to establish a broader vision for what we see as the future of the West," McAleese said.

Chuck Otto, Pinedale field manager for the Bureau of Land Management, stressed that largescale planning, rather than individual leasing and field plans, is the part of the process where some of the most momentous decisions are made.

"Planning is the essential ingredient in oil and gas development," Otto said.

Donna Gray, spokeswoman for Williams Companies Inc., said as long as flexibility is built into any rulemaking, most oil and gas companies are willing to work with locals, federal and state agencies to implement effective protection for wildlife and habitat.
A new sportsmen group that supports protecting fish and big game from the effects of energy development will hold a symposium Wednesday to Saturday in Grand Teton National Park.

Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development will host researchers and policy makers who will come up with specific “science based” recommendations for the next presidential administration and the next Congress. Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal is expected to deliver the keynote speech at 3 p.m. on Friday at Jackson Lake Lodge.

John Turner — former assistant secretary of state for oceans, international environments and scientific affairs, former president and CEO of The Conservation Fund, former director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and former president of the Wyoming state Senate — will deliver the opening keynote speech at 8:45 a.m. on Thursday.

Other speakers include Wyoming Game and Fish Department deputy director John Emmerich, Teton County Planning Commission member Larry Hamilton and Richard Whitley of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, as well as a host of conservation organizations and state agencies from Wyoming, Colorado and Utah.

Topics include planning and leasing for oil and gas development; research; monitoring and adaptive management; site management and enforcement; and reclamation and mitigation.

Group organizers say it’s time for hunters and anglers to get proactive about protecting fish and big game habitat from the effects of energy development across the Western states.

The group was founded by members of the National Wildlife Federation, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and Trout Unlimited.

Organizers say they will attempt to preserve land for hunting and fishing by influencing laws and policies in Western states.

As part of its campaign, the group developed a sportsmen’s “bill of rights.” It includes statements such as: “Our hunting and fishing heritage shall not be jeopardized by oil and gas development that fails to account for the future, long-term impacts to fish, wildlife and water” and, “The oil and gas industry shall pay its fair share of the cost for permitting and habitat restoration on public lands that are drilled for oil and gas.”
For information or to register, visit

Sportsmen open drive to protect special areas

By MARTY JONES

Sportsmen and sportswomen in the San Luis Valley got some welcome news recently - the Bureau of Land Management deferred plans to lease 84 parcels comprising 146,000 acres for oil and gas drilling in the Rio Grande National Forest. Three parcels near Crestone, however, were not pulled from the May 8 auction.

The proposed leases in the upper Rio Grande drainage straddle the Gold Medal stretch of the Rio Grande River, and overlap some very important fish and wildlife habitat, including some streams which support native Rio Grande cutthroat trout, a species recently recommended by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for listing under the Endangered Species Act. For hunters and anglers, this area is too valuable to sacrifice to the drill bit.

Groups representing sportsmen, along with the more traditional environmental and even government organizations, protested the planned lease sale. Many organizations noted the value of the proposed leases to all who treasure public lands and the hunting and fishing opportunities they provide.

Unfortunately, the lease sale was only deferred, not cancelled altogether. As a sportsman and resident of the San Luis Valley, I'm not ready to lower my guard until the land planned for drilling and all the industrial activity associated with it is taken off the table. I fear we may one day face what our fellow Coloradans in the San Juan or the Piceance basins are dealing with - an influx of industrial development that has altered communities and forever scarred lands that supposedly belong to every American. Last year, while riding my bicycle from
Craig to Rifle, I witnessed first-hand the devastation caused by over-development near the Roan Plateau.

At the same time, I understand the need to develop sustainable domestic energy resources, and we're doing our part here in the valley with our investment in alternative energy sources, particularly solar. We live in a special place, one that can greatly contribute to our country's energy needs. We don't need to trash special places to do it, either. I'm thankful this is something our local elected officials understand - the Saguache and Rio Grande county commissions protested the lease sale, and both U.S. Rep. John Salazar and U.S. Sen. Ken Salazar opposed the sale.

The current political climate in our country, though, doesn't seem to nurture the conservation creed so important to sportsmen. Up and down the Rocky Mountain West, we're seeing unprecedented oil and gas development to satisfy short-term energy demands. Drilling rigs are slowly migrating uphill, moving from valley floor big-game winter range habitat into the high country.

As we work to develop our area's vast solar and wind energy resources we have much to fear from energy sources that are finite and costly, both economically and ecologically, to access. Pressed by the Bush administration to enable drilling, seemingly at all costs, the BLM will be back, and the U.S. Forest Service, under that same directive, will undoubtedly work in concert with its sister federal agency. This threat looms in the not too-distant future.

Those same groups that protested the lease sale have come together to form a larger national campaign, one aimed at protecting fishing and hunting resources throughout the West. This new organization, Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development, has composed a Bill of Rights, a list of reasonable expectations for energy development (accessible on-line at www.sportsmen4responsibleenergy.org/billofrights.html). I've endorsed the document, and stand behind this campaign that seeks only to find some reasonable answers to the challenges posed by today's "drill first, ask questions later" philosophy. Those answers, in the form of a policy recommendation, will be delivered to the next president and the next Congress, in hopes that special places such as the headwaters of the Rio Grande and the Sangre de Cristo Range will remain intact for future generations of anglers, hunters and other folks who use these areas for recreation.

For the sake of the upper Rio Grande, and for the sake of similar places all throughout the West, please visit the Web site and get involved in protecting our unique angling and hunting heritage.

Your kids and grandkids will thank you one day.

---

Jones is a long-time volunteer for Trout Unlimited in the San Luis Valley and a chemistry professor at Adams State College in Alamosa.
Sportsmen hope to shape policy on Western land use

Friday, 23 May 2008

Bob Moen - THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK, Wyo. -- Energy development is increasingly coming into conflict with traditional hunting and fishing grounds in the West, prompting concern from outdoor enthusiasts who want to see their longtime stomping grounds preserved for future generations.

With that goal in mind, some 175 scientists, policy makers and outdoor enthusiasts are meeting in Jackson Hole this week to come up with recommendations on the nation's energy policy that they hope will find their way to a new Congress and new presidential administration. The event is sponsored by National Wildlife Federation, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and Trout Unlimited.

Trout Unlimited spokesman Chris Hunt said Thursday that hunters and anglers don't oppose energy development but they also don't want to see their hunting and fishing grounds destroyed.

"If you're a sportsman in Wyoming or in Colorado or in Utah or Montana or New Mexico, you're watching as the places you hunt and fish are disappearing," Hunt said. "And it's a pretty simple equation, lost habitat equals lost opportunity."

Places such as the Wyoming Range, Colorado's Roan Plateau, New Mexico's Otero Mesa, Utah's Diamond Fork Creek and Montana's Beaverhead National Forest are examples of areas that need special protection, he said.

The oil and gas industry maintains that it's responsible in how it extracts minerals and that it is continually developing better and less obtrusive ways to operate.

"Technology has changed a lot on how things can be done to protect and enhance the wildlife," Bruce Hinchey, president of the Petroleum Association of Wyoming, said in a telephone interview from his office in Casper.

Hinchey said oil and gas companies aren't seeking to drill on mountain tops and can drill on the outer edges without much disturbance.

Suggestions being made at the symposium include slowing the pace of energy development, improving the science of determining impacts of energy development, putting more emphasis on protecting recreation areas and improving communication between all those involved and impacted by energy development.
Joanna Prukop, secretary for New Mexico's Energy, Mineral and Natural Resources Department, said states may have to surrender some of their lucrative mineral royalties in order to protect certain areas from energy development.

"Like when we withdrew the Valle Vidal from future leasing, that cost the state some money because of our share of the federal royalties," Prukop said.

She said it's time that wildlife and other environmental concerns gain as much emphasis as the need to meet growing national energy demands.

T.O. Smith, wildlife and energy coordinator for the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Department, said it is possible to satisfy all interests if the pace of energy development is controlled properly.

"What we would like to see is a longer, more sustained development that benefits the citizens of Montana, benefits fish and wildlife, benefits sportsmen and still provides a profit for companies and provides for the extraction of resources," Smith said.

Hinchey said the industry was concerned about preserving hunting and fishing areas. He noted that many industry workers are hunters and anglers themselves.

Industry is conducting studies and other projects to improve its operations so as to leave less of a footprint on the environment, he said.

"That's evolving and we'll continue to work on that," he said.

But Hinchey said oil and gas companies must keep up the pace of drilling in order to meet the nation's growing energy demands. New wells typically produce their highest volumes at the outset and decline from then on, he said.

"If you are going to keep up with the gas needs, you need to drill more wells," he said.

Trout Unlimited meets with Energy Industry

Posted: May 16, 2008 08:46 PM
Updated: May 21, 2008 11:58 AM

By: Courtney Jones

Many businesses and groups have interest in the Roan Plateau, from the gas industry to environmentalist and sportsmen.
Sometimes the goals of those groups come into conflict.

Friday, members of Trout Unlimited met with representatives of the energy industry in hopes of finding some common ground.

The energy industry wants to access land for natural gas drilling, something consumers and our economy depends on. However, sportsmen want to protect fish and wildlife habitats.

Right now, Trout Unlimited is concerned about five conservation populations of Colorado River Cutthroat Trout. The fish is a species of concern and the focus of a recovery program.

"Two of the populations up there are core populations, meaning they are genetically pure and those are fairly rare and it would be a shame if anything were to happen with those and we are very concerned that development up there could pose a serious threat," said Ken Neubecker, President of Colorado Trout Unlimited.

"Chevron looks to experts in all sorts of realms and particularly as it relates to fish and water quality. We don't claim to the be experts, we are always looking for new and innovative ideas," Kristi Pollard, the Community Engagement Specialist for Chevron.

Trout Unlimited says it has successfully developed partnerships with the energy industry and government agencies in other parts of Colorado and in other states. One project Trout Unlimited is involved with is the Sportsman's Bill of Rights.

It is a project Trout Unlimited, the National Wildlife Federation and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation have been working on for some time.

The Sportsman's Bill of Rights includes 10 principals to protect land as energy development happens across the region. It also looks to ensure recreational land users, like hunters and anglers, can co-exist with energy development.

"What we ultimate would like to do is have these policies taken on by the forest service and the Bureau of Land Management so that we wind up with more middle ground and less instances where we have disagreements" Trout Unlimited Energy Field Coordinator, Corey Fisher explains.

Pollard says Chevron is looking forward to working with Trout Unlimited and others groups in the future.

Members of Trout Unlimited say Friday's meeting is important because while they do have differences, both sides share some common interests. They hope by focusing on and building common interests, the two sides can work better together in the future.
Pace determines ultimate impact

Thursday, May 15, 2008 2:06 AM MDT

In the Rocky Mountain West, the race for energy extraction has opened up millions of acres of public land for exploration, industrial-scale roads and drilling. The large number of newspaper articles focused on this big issue in Wyoming is testimony to that.

As sportsmen and women, the original stewards of our wildlife, we need to get involved in the important conversations about our public lands! As hunters and anglers have joined the fray and expressed our dismay at the loss of habitat, agencies that manage our public lands continued to offer up the places deer rut, elk bugle and native trout spawn to oil and gas companies.

It is happening at such a fast pace that pipelines are not able to keep up with production, resulting in a financial loss to our state because Wyoming’s produced oil and gas is being sold at regionally discounted wholesale prices. Approximately 20 percent of land in Wyoming is leased for oil and gas development. Leasing of Wyoming landscapes is at 13 million acres and climbing.

Sportsmen and women have stepped up to broker a solution -- one that ensures development happens responsibly. Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development, a coalition of hunting and fishing organizations and businesses, formed in response to unprecedented loss of fish and wildlife habitat due to oil and gas drilling.

With a unified voice, this coalition has crafted the Sportsmen’s Bill of Rights, a 10-point plan to ensure that the government’s management of energy development on our public lands occurs with an eye toward conserving habitat, clean water and hunting and fishing opportunities for future generations of sportsmen.

As a Wyoming sportsman, I know that we need these energy resources and I support responsible development and the economic benefits that it provides for the Cowboy State. However, the pace of development and the fact it is often done without concern for wildlife and water resources is unacceptable.

The Bill of Rights presents a logical, local solution to conserve wildlife, water and our way of life. I support this and invite others to check it out. To endorse the Bill of Rights visit
Public asked to weigh in on oil and gas drilling

Phaedra Haywood | The New Mexican
6/10/2008

Planners hired to draft Santa Fe County policies for oil and gas production say the process will be an open and inclusive one.

Bruce Peshoff, one of a group of experts the county has hired, said his firm, Planning Works, will conduct four public workshops and two multiday design sessions designed to encourage public involvement. "It shows (the public) it's not just as simple as saying I don't want this here," Peshoff said to the County Commission on Tuesday.

Residents will be able to track the planning process, read documents, look at maps and make comments on a Web site that will be devoted to the project, he said.

Peshoff said the group will focus on general planning decisions, such as what types of growth should be allowed where, in addition to issues specific to hydrocarbon extraction — such as setbacks, noise and dust pollution.

Peshoff said the planners will develop a "pay as you grow" funding mechanism to ensure new infrastructure is paid for by new developments and not existing taxpayers.

Another member of the planning team, Bruce Kramer, a Houston-based attorney and professor who specializes in local regulation of oil and gas issues, said his role will be "essentially to assist the county in coming up with ordinances that are legally defensible."

Peshoff said county staff will be incorporated into the process as well. "We want them to be our go-to team," Peshoff said.
The oil and gas planning team is being charged with:

- Creating a legislative overlay zoning district for extraction activities in the Galisteo Basin.
- Creating a Galisteo Basin area plan.
- Making oil- and gas-related amendments to the county's general plan.
- Adopting a capital-improvement plan outlining the long-term goals of the county regarding public services such as fire, police and ambulance service.
- Amending the Land Development Code to address oil and gas development.
- Creating a special improvement district to pay for the additional public services that may be required in areas effected by oil and gas development.

Santa Fe County began revamping its development ordinances last fall after Tecton Energy announced plans to drill for oil in the Galisteo Basin. The county passed an interim ordinance in February that banned oil and gas production in the county for at least one year. It allows for a six-month extension.

Peshoff told the commission the work will be done by February, and the extension would not be needed.

County Attorney Steven Ross said the first round of public meetings will be held July 14-16.

Guest Opinion: BLM oil-gas report doesn't serve average Montanans

By STAN FRASIER
Helena Hunters & Anglers Association

Montanans live in a land of astonishing beauty; we have endless opportunities to enjoy the mountains, rivers and plains for which our state is famous.

Our public lands harbor abundant populations of fish and wildlife that support a growing outdoor industry and draw sportsmen and recreationists from across Montana and the nation. Some of these lands also contain oil and gas reserves, which can help address Americans' ever-growing need for fuel, if developed responsibly.

Responsible development is essential in managing Montana's energy resources. While we haven't yet seen the same level of development as Wyoming, increased drilling is on its way to our state. The Bureau of Land Management's quarterly energy lease sales now occur bimonthly. From January to September 2007, close to a half-million acres of Montana's
public lands were offered for sale to industry. While our reserves will be developed - for the
good of all Americans - pursuing them heedlessly will jeopardize the assets Montana's
outdoors bring to our state economy, residents' livelihoods and day-to-day lives.

That's why a report released recently by the Bureau of Land Management is so troubling. Called "EPCA III," it inventories oil and gas resources on more than 279 million acres of federal land. It asserts that many of these reserves are off-limits to development, and it suggests, misleadingly, that increased drilling on our public lands will cure all manner of societal ills. In short, it is a cynical attempt to cater to our anxiety caused by gas prices approaching $4 per gallon.

**Protecting fish, wildlife**

The problem with EPCA III, however, is that it exaggerates restrictions on public lands energy development. It paints an inaccurate picture of lands "inaccessible" to development. It suggests that natural-resource laws and protected areas are "impediments" to extraction. It ignores the value of keeping some public lands off-limits to drilling. In short, it throws the concept of multiple-use management, to which the BLM is legally required to adhere, out the window. In so doing, the federal government openly panders to industry and does a disservice to all of us who appreciate our outdoors.

Montana sportsmen are exquisitely positioned to understand the juxtaposition of developing our energy reserves and maintaining our fish and wildlife resources. Hunters and anglers dedicated substantial time and money to restore wildlife and rangelands early in the 20th century, and sportsmen feel responsible for upholding this conservation legacy. We also recognize that our country needs energy. We know it's possible to develop energy resources and protect vital fish and game habitat simultaneously.

Part of responsible development means that critically important habitat for fish and game should be excluded from drilling. In 2006, sportsmen celebrated when Congress passed legislation prohibiting future energy development on the Rocky Mountain Front. In its analysis of public lands unavailable for energy leases, however, EPCA III lists places like Glacier National Park, the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area and Everglades National Park in Florida. Is the government recommending that we open up our most iconic landscapes to drilling? How does this serve the greater public good?

Moreover, simply opening lands to development does not mean their fuel reserves will be immediately available for public consumption. Energy development in the United States is booming: Nearly 45 million acres of onshore lands are leased to industry. Yet only about 12 million of those acres are in production. The truth is that industry already has access to tens of millions of acres of public lands it could develop today.

**Pushing to lease public lands**

Why the push to lease our remaining public lands? In part, it's because leasing confers a carte blanche right to drill and develop. In granting industry this right, the BLM relinquishes the right to manage these lands for other values, such as fish and wildlife habitat, outdoor
enjoyment or the industry supported by hunters, anglers and recreationists.

Montana sportsmen must continue to work to ensure that energy development is done right on public lands. We need not sacrifice our wildlife, water and public lands for short-term gains.

Overall, the EPCA III report misleadingly depicts the availability of public energy reserves and manipulates data to support industry’s desire to open more lands to drilling. We need a new national energy policy that facilitates responsible development and accommodates our Western outdoor traditions. And by advocating such responsible policy, Montanans can continue to feel pride in ourselves and the state we call home.

*Stan Frasier, a Montana native and longtime Helena resident, is president of Helena Hunters & Anglers Association, which is affiliated with the Montana Wildlife Federation and National Wildlife Federation.*

**Fight over Rocky Mountain Front reignited with lease auction**

By MATTHEW BROWN • Associated Press Writer • June 3, 2008

BILLINGS — The decades-long fight over Montana’s Rocky Mountain Front is heating up again, with wildlife officials and private conservation groups seeking to stop the leasing of state-owned land for oil and gas development.

It's been a year and a half since drilling opponents declared victory on the picturesque, wildlife-rich Front. In December 2006, Congress approved a permanent ban on energy development from federal land in the region.

Since then, millions of dollars have been spent by private groups and the government to purchase conservation easements and buy back leases held by energy companies.

However, the leasing of minerals beneath state-owned lands continues. At least 8,400 acres in the shadow of the front’s towering mountains already are under lease. Another 700 acres will be auctioned June 10, by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

Another state agency — Fish, Wildlife and Parks — and two conservation groups have asked the DNRC to defer the auction.

“The Rocky Mountain Front is a special place for wildlife, and it’s a special place for sportsmen,” said T.O. Smith with Fish, Wildlife and Parks. “It’s inconsistent for the state to continue leasing along the Rocky Mountain Front, when the federal government has made a
commitment through legislative action to not lease or develop.”

Prized for its dense populations of grizzly bears, elk and mule deer, the Front stretches for about 100 miles through central Montana. Its craggy peaks rise from the Great Plains south of Glacier National Park to mark the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains.

The June 10 auction includes a 520-acre tract beneath the state’s Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area.

DNRC director Mary Sexton said her agency intends to go through with the auction — although with a recommendation to the state land board to impose some conditions on development.

She said the state is obligated to auction leases as a way to generate revenue from publicly owned land.

“If we don’t lease, we’re not following the mandate of getting revenue,” she said. Companies would have to conduct environmental reviews and, in the case of the Blackleaf, use directional drilling to access the lease’s gas reserves from outside the refuge.

Wyoming needs to balance energy, wildlife concerns

Wednesday, June 11, 2008 2:06 AM MDT

Star-Tribune Editorial Board

Wyoming officials and agencies routinely decide cases involving state revenue and wildlife. But rarely has a decision pitted both interests directly against each other as has an issue now before the state Board of Land Commissioners.
Cimarex Energy Co. of Denver wants to build a natural gas processing and carbon sequestration plant on state land in Sublette County. It would be the largest sequestration project in the world -- precisely the type of plant the state of Wyoming has been trying to recruit. The plant could help serve the nation's energy needs by processing natural gas while lowering the volume of carbon dioxide emissions.

Unfortunately, the site the company has selected along the Wyoming Range Front in the Riley Ridge area includes crucial winter range for the largest wintering elk herd in the county. The state Game and Fish Department opposes the location but says the plant would be acceptable on an adjacent section of private land that would have less impact on the elk.

Cimarex maintains the state school section is the best site, and the company has ruled out any alternative locations.

A lot of money is at stake with this project. The plant could generate an estimated $24 million per year for the state's school trust.

Is the state willing to lose that amount of money annually for the sake of 200 elk? The answer will help determine how we view our state's priorities, and how others ultimately view Wyoming.

Fortunately, the current situation isn't yet down to a question of either the money or the elk. There's still a lot of room for negotiations between the state and Cimarex before a final determination about the plant is made. There's no reason the state Board of Land Commissioners has to make a quick decision.

In fact, while Secretary of State Max Maxfield favored approving the special use permit for the project at last week's meeting, none of the other four state officials on the land board agreed. Gov. Dave Freudenthal, the board's chairman, directed the Office of State Land and Investments to analyze the project and wildlife concerns and prepare a report for the board in August.

The sequestration plant could be a valuable resource for Wyoming and the nation. But the state is providing so much of the nation's energy needs, it has earned the right to decide whether a location should be off-limits to any type of development that would be harmful to a native species.

Persuading Cimarex to build on an alternative site would be the best solution to the dilemma in Sublette County. Until all options are explored, the question of money vs. wildlife can remain unanswered.

But Wyoming should realize that the question will inevitably be posed again somewhere in the state. We need to start seriously considering our answer.
Agreement reached for wildlife area drilling outside New Castle

Energy company would’ve ignored DOW requests to lessen impacts otherwise

By Phillip Yates
Glenwood Springs, CO Colorado
June 13, 2008

GUNNISON, Colorado — Colorado Wildlife Commissioners on Thursday unanimously approved a surface-use agreement with Orion Energy Partners that will allow the company to begin drilling in Garfield Creek State Wildlife Area this summer.

Commissioners approved the agreement because of the possibility that if they didn’t, Orion could simply ignore Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) requests to lessen its impacts on the wildlife area, pay the state a bond and begin drilling in the habitat within 30 days once it received a state permit to drill.

Ron Velarde, northwest regional manager for the DOW, told the commissioners during a workshop Thursday that Orion has indicated to the state that it would go that route if commissioners did not approve the agreement.

One commissioner asked if the wildlife commission had any legal “leg to stand on” if it voted against the agreement with Orion. An agency attorney simply responded that the DOW couldn’t stop Orion from drilling in the 13,200-acre wildlife refuge for deer, elk and other wildlife. That’s because while the agency owns the surface, it does not own the mineral rights below.

Orion plans to drill one exploratory well about 200 yards from Garfield County Road 312 south of New Castle at a site selected by the DOW. The company also plans to install a 2.4-mile pipeline and build an access road of about 200 feet at the site.

Dorothea Farris, a newly appointed wildlife commissioner and Pitkin County commissioner, said she thought it was unfortunate that the oil and gas industry does not recognize “that some areas should not be developed.” Orion representatives were at the workshop, but they did not speak.

The commissioners’ approval of the agreement with Orion comes at a time when a protest the DOW filed against the sale of a federal mineral lease parcel underneath the state wildlife area has yet to be resolved. The Bureau of Land Management auctioned off that parcel in February.
The DOW wrote a letter to the BLM in late January, asking that the sale of the parcel be delayed indefinitely because the land on top “provides crucial winter range for deer and elk that are finding fewer and fewer places to inhabit without conflict.”

Working with Orion
The surface-use-agreement the commissioners approved includes several wildlife and environmental mitigation requirements that Orion will have to follow. Those include seasonal drilling restrictions.

“The purpose of working on the surface-use-agreement with Orion was so we could have control over the surface and obtain compensation for damages and impose seasonal closures and have recourse to go back to the company if something is not done properly,” said Kim Kaal, a DOW energy liaison for northwest Colorado.

Velarde said if it were up to him “there wouldn’t be any drilling.” However, Orion chose to engage the DOW in its development of the area.

“They have been working with us for 10 months to come up with a package where we minimize the impact on wildlife,” Velarde said.

Orion has agreed to implement best management practices, which include reducing odor and dust from its operations and using pipelines to transport produced water that will reduce the amount of truck activity from Orion’s drilling operations. The company also agreed to perform water sampling for a radius of one mile around the well pad.

Velarde stressed that the surface-use-agreement commissioners approved Thursday is only for the one well.

If Orion is successful and wants to drill more wells, then the agency and the company are going to have to “go back to the drawing board,” with the state requiring more compensation and additional mitigation that will minimize the impacts to wildlife, Velarde said.

Worries for the area
Despite the nearly insurmountable legal obstacle in preventing drilling from occurring in Garfield Creek, area resident Susan Will asked commissioners to not approve the surface-use-agreement.

“The employees of the DOW never dreamed that we would be talking about gas drilling on the wildlife area,” said Will, who lives near the habitat. “It is the only area that has winter range that has not been affected by the oil and gas industry.”

While Will said she appreciated the efforts DOW officials and Orion representatives have made to come to an agreement, she was “certain this project is going to have a huge, lasting and detrimental effect.”

“This is an area that cannot be replaced,” Will said.
3 parcels spared from oil drilling

By Patty Henetz
The Salt Lake Tribune
Article Last Updated: 05/30/2008 12:58:29 AM MDT

Concerns about greater sage-grouse habitat has prompted the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to remove three parcels covering 1,640 acres of federal land from an oil and gas lease sale scheduled for next week.

The original plan was to lease 13 parcels covering 7,070 acres near Vernal, Huntington and Wellington, but protests filed by two environmental organizations and a sportsmen's group convinced the BLM state office in Salt Lake City to reconsider, agency spokeswoman Terry Catlin said Thursday.

But the three groups - the Center for Natural Ecosystems, Red Rock Forests and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership - said the decision doesn't affect other fish, wildlife and vegetation that could suffer if the leases were sold.

"It's encouraging [BLM] deferred three parcels," said Joel Webster, a regional spokesman for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. "But they're still not looking at how to develop the areas in ways that don't unnecessarily [harm] fish and wildlife."

The TRCP protest filed May 20, its eighth this year in Utah, cited concerns about crucial mule deer and elk winter range as well as greater sage-grouse habitat. The group does not oppose oil and gas development, but wants the BLM in its environmental studies and lease plans to treat wildlife as an equally important resource.

"Natural gas development is important," Webster said. "But are we willing to give away every other value we have, all these places people can go to hunt and fish and camp, are we willing to give up those places for energy development?"

During a Wednesday morning teleconference, the Wilderness Society said federal energy policy is giving oil and gas companies more access to public land at the expense of wildlife, cultural resources, wilderness and other assets that could be damaged by drilling.

A report the BLM released a week ago aimed at minimizing restraints on oil and gas production "unless it is absolutely necessary for the preservation of other resources present on the land," described environmental protection law, municipal development, private property concerns, wildlife concerns and even National Park designations as obstacles to drilling.
In Utah, six BLM resource management plans covering more than 10 million acres are under revision. The current plans are 10 to 26 years old, which means BLM is using outdated information when evaluating leases or drilling permits, said Wilderness Society attorney Nada Culver.

But Catlin said BLM uses current data compiled by the Utah Department of Natural Resources to help make its decisions.

If a protective designation for certain public lands is under consideration in the new plans, and if energy development would destroy the qualities worthy of protection, BLM will not lease the parcels, she said.

Since 2002, the policy has led BLM to defer leases on more than 2 million acres in Utah.

Wyoming Range Leasing Resisted

Posted on: Thursday, 19 June 2008, 03:00 CDT

By Snow, Nick

When the US Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee sent 45 public land, forest, park, and water bills to the floor on May 7, the measures included closure of 1.2 million federal acres in Wyoming to future oil and gas leasing. "Natural gas prices are up 48% over this time last year, and consumers could pay as much as $85.9 billion more for gas in 2008 vs. 2007," said Paul N. Cicio, president of the Industrial Energy Consumers of America. "At a time when every homeowner, farmer, and manufacturer is suffering from high energy costs, this is not the time for Congress to withdraw access to large amounts of natural gas."

But S. 2229 has the support of the Cowboy State's two US senators, Republicans John Barrasso and Mike Enzi; its governor, Democrat Dave Freudenthal; and many others because it involves a mountain range that is 100 miles long, 12,000 ft high, and named for the state.

It also is a bill that Barrasso's predecessor, Craig L. Thomas, was spearheading before he died on June 4, 2007. "This legislation, [which] Craig Thomas was ready to introduce the week he passed, goes to the very heart and soul of Wyoming," Barrasso said when he introduced the measure on Oct. 25.

'Simply too special'
After the bill passed the committee on May 7, Barrasso said he promised voters that he would continue Thomas's work to preserve the Wyoming Range. "I strongly support oil and gas development in our state, but I also believe that some places are simply too special to develop," he said.

Barrasso said that S. 2229 respects current leaseholders' property rights in the Wyoming Range and Bridger-Teton National Forest by allowing other parties, presumably conservation groups, to buy the leases and retire them. It does not prevent future production from current leases.

About 4,300 producing oil and gas wells in the three counties covered by the legislation and 4,399 proposed wells would not be affected, Barrasso added.

Independent Petroleum Association of Mountain States Executive Director Marc W Smith often reminds me that IPAMS members are avid fishermen and sportsmen. So I asked for his reaction to the bill.

Abundant in energy

"IPAMS recognizes the sensitivity of the Wyoming Range and the special place it holds for the people of Wyoming. In addition to being abundant in beauty, it also is prospectively abundant in critical energy resources," he responded.

IPAMS is very concerned about removing areas from future production, he continued. It also recognizes that Barrasso made important changes in response to industry concerns. "The bill provides voluntary, not mandatory, options for leaseholders and allows for continued activity and potential growth in existing producing fields," Smith said.

The next step is to identify areas appropriate for energy development and places most critical to protect in the Wyoming Range, he said.

Nick Snow, Washington Editor

Copyright PennWell Publishing Company May 19, 2008

(c) 2008 Oil & Gas Journal. Provided by ProQuest Information and Learning. All rights Reserved.
DENVER -

With a weeklong series of hearings on new oil and gas regulations looming, backers of stronger rules are urging state officials not to back off their proposals while industry officials are warning of economic collapse.

Hundreds of people were expected at a hearing Monday at the Paramount Theater in downtown Denver. The session will launch a week of meetings on proposals to revamp how oil and gas development is managed in Colorado.

An earlier gathering in western Colorado, a hot spot of the state's natural gas development, drew about 2,000.

Stoking the pre-hearing emotions were recommended changes to proposals first released by regulators in March. State officials say they're clarifications based on comments from the public and oil and gas industry.

"I don't view it as a watering down," said Dave Neslin, acting director of the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, the main regulatory body.

Neslin said laws approved last year that require more consideration for wildlife, the environment and public health when approving oil and gas production also require the state to foster development of the resources.

"It's a balance," Neslin said.

The balance has been in the industry's favor and supporters of tougher rules say the state risks keeping it that way by backing off before the oil and gas commission votes on final regulations in August.

"The state seems to be caving into industry opposition on very reasonable, public health safeguards," said Jeremy Nichols of Denver-based Rocky Mountain Clean Air Action.

Nichols opposes recommendations to exempt the San Juan Basin in southwest Colorado from rules targeting odors from oil and gas facilities.

While wildlife and environmental groups believe regulators are backpedaling, critics of the new rules accuse the state of continuing to streamroll an industry that generates thousands of jobs and billions of dollars.

"I think it's important to note that the state has made the claim before that they've made changes. It's been more like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic," said Meg Collins, president of the trade group Colorado Oil and Gas Association.
Collins dismissed suggestions that oil and gas companies wouldn't be satisfied by any compromise.

Newspaper and radio ads by Collins’ group and the Colorado Petroleum Association have warned of "job-killing rules" proposed by state regulators and a "looming threat to Colorado's economy."

"The state needs to sit down with industry," said Glenn Moltrer, a Las Animas County businessman and landowner. "The rest of the country is in a recession and the oil and gas industry is one of the reasons Colorado isn't."

Moltrer, whose construction business does some work for oil and gas companies, said he fears the fallout for his county if strict regulations dampen the industry's interest in Colorado.

"It's misleading to view this as a zero-sum game," Neslin of the oil and gas commission said. "I don't believe one side or another is winning or losing."

But Dave Nickum of the Colorado chapter of Trout Unlimited said he's worried about losing ground. He's concerned about a suggested change from the draft rules to limit buffers around water bodies to just rivers and lakes with native cutthroat trout or gold-medal fisheries.

Nickum said nearly three pages of recommendations from state wildlife officials on protections for fish were pared in the draft rules to 300-foot buffers around oil and gas wells. He suggested reopening the issue if the number of areas protected are cut back.

"Major sections of the Colorado and Gunnison rivers wouldn't be protected," Nickum said. "The entire Yampa and Eagle (rivers) wouldn't be covered."

Another proposed change to the draft rules would reduce buffers around community water supplies from 500 feet to 300 feet. Tim Sarmo, town administrator of Palisade, said an energy company has already leased 10,000 acres in the community's watershed.

"I don't dispute the importance of natural gas, but I think all of us would recognize that water takes precedence," Sarmo said. "We don't understand industry's objection to the 500-foot setback."

Other suggested modifications include giving companies until 2010 to comply with rules on minimizing the impacts on certain wildlife and habitat if the companies consult with state wildlife officials or submit comprehensive development plans. The original compliance date was Nov. 1.

Companies that don't negotiate with wildlife officials or come up with development plans face restrictions of up to 90 days on when they can drill during mating and birthing seasons in certain areas, mostly in western Colorado.
The industry has assailed the proposal as a moratorium that would require "all drilling west of (Interstate 25) shut down operations for three months out of the year."

"That's just a blatant mischaracterization because of all of those other tools available for operators to use," said Suzanne O'Neill, executive director of the Colorado Wildlife Federation.

O'Neill questions what will happen to vulnerable wildlife if adoption of the safeguards is delayed. The state is seeing record gas drilling rates and O'Neill said companies might push through drilling permit applications before 2010.

Colorado's wildlife, including some of the country's largest deer and elk herds, generates millions of dollars for the state from hunting, fishing and recreation, O'Neill said.

"It's a significant part of our economy, as well producing benefits that can't be quantified on a balance sheet," she added.

Draft oil and gas rules protect state's big draw

By Suzanne O'Neill

*The Denver Post*

Article Last Updated: 06/22/2008 10:04:36 PM MDT

As one of our state's oldest and most consistent advocates for wildlife, the Colorado Wildlife Federation has long recognized the importance of oil and gas development in Colorado. At the same time, we have consistently emphasized that oil and gas development must occur in a responsible and balanced manner if we are to sustain our irreplaceable wildlife resource.

On one side of the balance is the compelling call to protect wildlife for the benefit of this and succeeding generations. On the other is the oil and gas industry's push to lease and drill the West's land as quickly as possible.
Colorado wildlife's side of the scale is tangible, fragile and of inestimable long-term value. Our wildlife species already face a multitude of threats, man-made and natural, including disease, loss of winter range and low stream flows. The unprecedented pace and scope of drilling are a growing threat. Expansion of that threat into ever-more sensitive and indispensable wildlife habitat compounds the danger.

Surveys show that the public places a special value on wildlife in Colorado as a factor in their quality of life and as an important segment of the state’s economy, contributing $2.5 billion from hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing and photography.

Wildlife-based recreation is a sustainable economic resource that will grow in importance if we fulfill our role as stewards of the West.

This wildlife resource is a national and international attraction that draws people to visit, spend time in and settle in Colorado. For these and other reasons, wildlife also provides substantial value that cannot be tallied on a balance sheet.

Survival of our wildlife heritage for the benefit of residents, visitors and future generations can be secured only if our actions at this defining juncture are consistent with these values.

We return again and again to the concept of balance — because that notion is necessary to ensure that today's policies incorporate an effective line of sight to the long-term benefit of wildlife. We also recognize that a tension always exists between interests focused upon short-term gain and those that offer long-term value.

This week, the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission will conduct a formal hearing on its draft rules that are intended to minimize adverse impacts on wildlife as required under a state law unanimously adopted last year by the Colorado General Assembly. The Colorado Wildlife Federation and others worked hard on House Bill 1298. We believe the draft rules provide a judicious measure of protections and tools to increase the probability that wildlife populations can be sustained.

Many in the oil and gas industry are injudicious in demanding that the rules merely endorse their short-term view that they should be entitled to select any best-management practice they choose in the name of minimizing adverse impacts on wildlife. They argue unrelentingly against the wildlife protections specified in the draft rule.

By way of example, the president of the Colorado Oil and Gas Association urges the commission to slow down the process to create sound policy based on fact rather than "emotion and hyperbole." The wildlife-protection provisions in the draft rules are not based upon flimsy assertions. They are grounded in the expertise of wildlife biologists.

The industry also conveniently omits the fact that timing limitations to protect specific species in key habitats such as winter concentration areas acts as a backstop. These limitations become applicable only if a company chooses not to avail itself of alternative tools. The rules appropriately provide incentives and tools for companies to factor in how to minimize adverse impact on wildlife in planning drilling operations.
Colorado's palette of attractions, in which wildlife is certainly not the least, is the envy of much of the nation and the world. Colorado's wildlife and the habitat it needs to survive are worth sustaining.

Suzanne O'Neill is executive director of the Colorado Wildlife Federation.

**Post Independent**

**Backers defend new oil and gas regulations at Denver hearings**

Glenwood Springs, CO Colorado

June 25, 2008

DENVER, Colorado (AP) — Wildlife advocates and environmentalists defended proposed new regulations for oil and gas development in Colorado Tuesday, saying the industry was exaggerating about how much they would cost companies.

“Let’s make no mistake about it, this is a highly profitable industry,” said Lance Astrella, an attorney representing environmental and landowner groups.

His comments came on the second day of public hearings on the contentious proposals, which were drafted amid Colorado’s struggle to blunt some of the impact from a natural gas boom.

Proponents say updated oil and gas regulations are long overdue considering the drilling rates. The state issued a record 6,368 drilling permits last year — six times the 1999 total.

State officials say at least 7,000 permits could be approved this year.

“With the proliferation of drilling that’s going on now and that’s going to continue into the future, there’s going to be a cost of doing it right,” Astrella said.

Without regulations balancing environmental and health concerns with energy development, Astrella said, those costs will be borne by landowners whose property values drop, water users whose water is polluted or dries up and taxpayers who have to finance cleaning up contamination.

Opponents of the rules say they go too far, too fast and could prompt some companies to leave the state.

Industry representatives urged regulators to ask “piercing questions” about the need for the
new rules and rely on facts rather than perceptions when considering them.

The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, the main regulatory body, is expected to vote on the new rules in mid-August after a series of hearings and public meetings.

The rules were written in response to state laws approved last year that give more weight to health, wildlife and environmental concerns in oil and gas regulations. Decisions about development are to be made with input from state health and wildlife experts.

Companies would have until 2010 to comply with rules on minimizing the impacts on certain wildlife and habitat if they consult with state wildlife officials, submit comprehensive development plans or reduce the number of wells. The original compliance date was Nov. 1 in draft rules released March 31.

Companies that don’t negotiate with wildlife officials or submit development plans face restrictions of up to 90 days on when they can drill to protect wildlife during mating and birthing seasons.

“The proposed rules released March 31 will result in some fairly significant cost increases for industry,” industry consultant Doug Dennison said.

Having to confer with the state Division of Wildlife could cost an additional $150,000 to $200,000 per project and there’s no guarantee an agreement will be reached, Dennison said.

Other industry officials said some of the proposed rules could delay approval of drilling permits, resulting in lower profits for companies, less tax revenue for state and local governments and higher costs for consumers.

Commission members questioned some of the industry’s assumptions in their economic reports, including one saying that the new regulations could reduce oil and gas production by up to 30 percent.

Groups seek more grouse protection

By MATTHEW BROWN
Associated Press writer
BILLINGS, Mont. -- Two conservation groups have asked the federal government to impose new restrictions on oil and gas development in the West to protect the greater sage grouse, a popular game bird on the decline.

Scientists contend sage grouse breeding areas are suffering in the face of accelerating oil and gas exploration in Wyoming, Montana, Colorado, Utah and other Western states. West Nile virus, drought and residential development have also taken a toll on the bird, which is being considered for the endangered species list.

Federal rules now say oil and gas companies cannot drill within a quarter mile of sage grouse breeding areas, or leks. Last week, Idaho-based North American Grouse Partnership and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership of Washington, D.C., filed a legal petition asking for the rule be extended to two miles.

"The birds aren't doing too well, and biologists have known for quite some time that a quarter-mile buffer was not effective," said Steve Belinda, a former Bureau of Land Management biologist now with the Theodore Roosevelt group. "The BLM has the authority to do better. Nobody has said they can't go beyond that if it's warranted."

An attorney for the groups said the government was obligated to consider the petition but not adopt it. A decision could take several months.

Unless drilling is slowed, Belinda said, the chicken-sized grouse could end up on the endangered species list. That could shut down public hunting for the bird and prompt restrictions on residential development, oil and gas activity and agriculture.

One BLM field office in Buffalo already is making preliminary moves to slow drilling. Officials there are considering more grouse protections on 200,000 to 400,000 acres in the Powder River Basin -- a region along the Montana-Wyoming border where the birds live among tens of thousands of natural gas wells.

Under a pending plan, new development would be restricted temporarily in parts of the basin, until more analysis is done on how to protect the bird. Other areas of the Powder River Basin would see drilling continue.

"In other words, we haven't compromised the entire area (of sage grouse habitat)," said Paul Beels, BLM's associate field manager in Buffalo. "We haven't changed anything yet, but based on the new science that's come out, we feel like it's leading us in that direction."

Further details of the plan are expected next month. Matt Spangler, a BLM spokesman in Washington, D.C., said he was not aware of any other field office adopting similar measures.

The conservationists' request on sage grouse comes as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says it will decide by December whether to put the bird on the endangered species list. The agency declined to do so in 2005.
A judge in December ordered the agency to re-evaluate that decision after determining it was tainted by political meddling from a Bush administration official who resigned in 2007.

Here's the drill: BLM pulls rank on state

By Charlie Meyers
The Denver Post
Article Last Updated: 07/01/2008 11:18:38 PM MDT

Amid all the loud noises erupting from the recent series of hearings conducted by the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission regarding water and wildlife protection, one reality has escaped public notice.

When all debate is done, the state agency may not have the authority to enforce whatever rules it finally adopts.

Citing a list of legal precedents, the Bureau of Land Management claims jurisdiction to conduct leasing on federal lands as it sees fit. This assertion was made early last month in a letter to the commission from Sally Wisely, director of BLM's Colorado State Office.

"BLM believes that certain draft rules would be pre-empted by federal law if applied to oil and gas operations on federal lands," Wisely wrote in a five-page letter that repeatedly proclaimed supremacy regarding activities on the federal domain.

"The COGCC may avoid the pre-emption problems discussed above by adding language to the draft rules which acknowledges that COGCC regulations do not apply to federal lands and minerals absent BLM concurrence."

In the federal hierarchy, BLM administers all matters pertaining to minerals, even on Forest Service lands. All of which appears to set the stage for a direct state-federal conflict of the sort that has not existed for a century or more.

For its part, Colorado's Department of Natural Resources, of which COGCC is a part, shows no inclination to back down.

"Issues regarding water and wildlife are expressly reserved for the state and we intend to protect them under the state constitutional provisions and mandates," said Mike King, DNR deputy director.
At the root of the skirmish are COGCC draft rules stipulating a drilling distance of 300 feet from streams, along with a requirement that drilling cease during critical periods of deer, elk or sage grouse reproduction. These issues were detailed last week on this page.

After initially issuing stricter draft rules on these matters, COGCC appeared to be waffling in the face of industry protests. Wildlife advocates since have mounted a vigorous campaign to reinstate the original draft. COGCC expects to issue its decision next month.

This latest interagency battle serves to confuse the issue and, considering the timing of Wisely's letter, perhaps further tip the scales toward the industry position of maximum development.

Snared in this blue haze of bureaucracy are the contrasting currents of federal supremacy and the fact that all applications for drilling must be processed and approved through COGCC. Questioned about this obvious discord, both agencies tried to downplay the discord.

"There's no turf war, just two agencies with overlapping regulatory authority," said Steven Hall, BLM communication director. "The best solution is to iron out our conflicts."

King offered similar conciliation.

"I don't expect a tremendous amount of conflict at the end of the day," he declared.

Meanwhile, wildlife proponents are keeping an eagle eye on the proceedings.

"If BLM insists on doing business this way, we'll insist, we will demand it perform site-specific environmental analysis before any permits are issued," said Steve Torbit, regional executive director of the National Wildlife Federation. "We feel BLM will have to step up to the plate with a full analysis with the state."

Should the division continue, litigation from any of the three entities seems a very real prospect.

---

**Post Independent**

Roan leasing faces challenges

By Phillip Yates

Glenwood Springs, CO Colorado
Monday, June 30, 2008

RIFLE, Colorado - The Bureau of Land Management is estimating that its Aug. 14 lease sale of about 55,100 federal acres on the Roan Plateau for natural gas drilling will bring in between $100 million to $300 million.

Industry groups and some others believe the sale could bring in even more money, potentially showering Colorado with cash. That's because the federal government shares about half of what it receives from development of its leases with the states.

But there are several lingering problems with the BLM's lease sale and any potential revenue that could come back to Colorado from it. Those problems - which include possible litigation to block the sale - should come into sharper focus as Aug. 14 draws nearer.

The specter of natural gas drilling over vast tracts of the Roan Plateau, which is northwest of Rifle, has been a source of controversy for the last several years. Several environmental and, recently, sportsman groups have fought for years to combat drilling in the Roan Plateau area, citing the area's wildlife, which includes genetically pure native cutthroat trout.

There is still another month and a half to go until the lease sale occurs, but there is one little-understood complication surrounding it. That is if the secretaries of the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and Department of Interior do not certify the cleanup process at the Anvil Points Oil Shale Superfund site near Rulison before Aug. 14, the state will not immediately bank its share of the lease sale.

Steven Hall, a spokesman for the BLM in Colorado, said that will not happen because the agency "fully expects" that the certification will occur before the Roan Plateau lease sale.

"We have a plan in place and significant money in place to execute that (cleanup)," Hall said. "That is what we believe will happen before the August lease sale."

If the certification of the cleanup does not come before the sale, revenues would flow into a trust fund set up to pay for the cleanup of the Anvil Points research station, Hall said. That fund currently has about $96 million and accumulates about $1 million to $2 million each month.

The DOE Anvil Points site is a former oil shale research station and has a pile below it that contains spent shale and other material, including arsenic and other heavy metals, from oil shale mining and processing. The pile is considered to be a threat to ground and surface water, including the Colorado River.

Trust fund and certification
A 1997 federal law that transferred lands in the Roan Plateau Planning Area to BLM control stipulated that money generated from federal mineral leases or royalties in the area would go into the trust fund and would be targeted specifically for the cleanup of the station. No money would be returned to the state prior to certification of the station's cleanup.
Once the cleanup is certified, said Hall, all money generated from current and future natural gas production in the Roan Plateau Planning Area would be split between the federal government and Colorado.

**Money and legal problems**

But language in a $555-billion spending bill late last year changed the revenue sharing arrangement the federal government has with the states for royalties and money from federal leases from a 50-50 split, to a 52-48 split in favor of the federal government.

That change, which altered the sharing agreement the federal government has had with the states since the 1920s, would mean Colorado could lose out on about $2 million if the low BLM estimate for Roan Plateau leases comes to pass. If the BLM's high estimate occurs, Colorado would lose out on $6 million.

Both U.S. Sen. Ken Salazar, D-Colo., and U.S. Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., along with others in Colorado's congressional delegation, have announced efforts to change that language.

Evan Dreyer, a spokesman for Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter, said the state would like to see legislators work to return the sharing of federal mineral revenues back to its traditional 50-50 split. He also noted that there is a possibility the Aug. 14 lease sale may not even go forward as scheduled.

That's because several environmental groups have signaled that they plan to launch litigation to block it, saying a lawsuit is the last possible tool they have to stop large-scale development in the Roan Plateau. Those groups also plan to formally protest the inclusion of Roan Plateau leases in the sale.

If protests are filed, the BLM tells those who acquire leases that development cannot occur until those protests have been resolved.

Dreyer said that no decision has been made about whether the state plans to protest the lease sale.

**Possible legislation**

Although Roan lease money is not expected to flow into the Anvil Points trust fund, any money left in that fund after the station’s cleanup is completed will be lost unless there is a "legislative remedy," said Steve Wymer, a spokesman for Allard.

About $30 million for the cleanup and another $39 million to the DOE for infrastructure the agency developed at the research station will have to come out of that trust fund.

A bipartisan effort earlier this year by Allard, Ken Salazar, and Rep. John Salazar, D-Manassa, would seek to split the balance in the trust fund, following certification of the cleanup, evenly between the state and the federal government. The bulk of the cost of the
cleanup and money reimbursed to the DOE would come out of the federal share.

Stephanie Valencia, a spokeswoman for Ken Salazar, said the senator is still working to move that bill, along with other efforts to restore the 50-50 split, forward in the Senate and is "looking forward to opportunities to do so."

Language in the bipartisan bill would allow Garfield and Rio Blanco counties to each receive 40 percent of the expected millions returned to Colorado from the trust fund, while Moffat and Mesa counties would each receive 10 percent of that money.

"We are pleased that Senator Salazar was able to come on board with us earlier this year, and we continue to look for any vehicle to use to pass this legislation," said Wymer, saying the senator has been advocating bringing money in the trust back to Colorado before anyone else. "We face an uphill battle. There will be a lot of competing interests in the short time we have here in Washington. We face a lot of legislative challenges."

Contact Phillip Yates: 384-9117

Santa Fe County Helps Oil Fight

By Raam Wong
Journal Staff Writer
Sunday, July 06, 2008

Rio Arriba County is getting some help in its battle against an oil and gas company's drilling plans from its neighbor to the south.
Attorneys for Santa Fe County — embroiled in its own drilling controversy — last week filed a legal brief in the oil company's lawsuit against Rio Arriba, arguing local governments do in fact have the authority to regulate the industry.

“This is a matter of critical importance to Santa Fe County, Rio Arriba County and every city and county in the state of New Mexico,” the amicus brief states.

As record gas prices motivate energy companies to explore in frontier areas of northern New Mexico, local officials in places like Mora and Tierra Amarilla are scrambling to update their drilling regulations.

In April, the Rio Arriba County Commission adopted a four-month moratorium on new drilling in response to Approach Resource's proposal to drill 10 wells in the Rio Chama watershed outside Tierra Amarilla.

Approach filed suit against the county in May. The Fort Worth, Texas, company argues the drilling ban amounts to a taking of its mineral rights and that the regulations being written by the county in the meantime are the province of the state, not local government. The company is asking the federal courts to overturn the moratorium.

Santa Fe County has taken a similar tack in response to Tecton Energy's drilling proposal for the Galisteo Basin southeast of Santa Fe The county also imposed a moratorium in response to Tecton's proposal to drill 10 wells in the Galisteo Basin. The moratorium was meant to buy time to beef up its oil and gas rules, study the basin's resources and ensure the region has adequate public facilities and services. Tecton has also threatened to sue for unlawful taking of its property.

In its brief filed in the Approach lawsuit, Santa Fe County argues local regulations are not pre-empted by state law and asks the court to dismiss the suit. The state Legislature has delegated to counties “police power” — the authority to write laws promoting the health and prosperity of residents, the county brief states.

The fact that the state Oil Conservation Division has regulatory authority over the industry is not sufficient evidence to conclude state authority trumps local government when it comes to oil and gas, the brief states.

State regulations fall short because they do not minimize the off-site impacts of drilling through control of the location of drilling sites, and do not assure public facilities and services are available or protect wetlands, habitats and historical treasures, according to the brief.

In January, Gov. Bill Richardson imposed his own five-month moratorium on drilling in the Galisteo Basin and directed state agencies to work with local governments on the regulation issue — a move the brief argues highlights local authority over the industry.

Rio Arriba County staffers have been critical of Richardson for jumping into the Santa Fe fracas while remaining silent about the Tierra Amarilla proposal. Richardson's office has not
responded to inquiries about whether the governor would also support a state-mandated drilling moratorium for Rio Arriba.

Santa Fe County attorneys were joined in filing the brief in the Rio Arriba lawsuit by the New Mexico Association of Counties.

“We're trying to preserve local control for other counties who might face similar situations,” association executive director Paul Gutierrez said Saturday.

The brief states that Approach's request for an injunction against the county would “clearly and adversely affect the public interest by subverting the rightful exercise of the police power by Rio Arriba County’s Board of County Commissioners who have been elected to protect the public health, safety, morals and general welfare of its citizens.”

The counties appeared to receive additional support from the state Energy, Minerals, Natural Resources Department on Thursday. In a report about the Galisteo Basin, the department recommends that local governments adopt ordinances addressing issues like setbacks, noise and air pollution at drilling sites.

Rio Arriba is asking the state Oil Conservation Division to revoke four of Approach's current drilling permits and to deny six others that are pending. The county argues drilling could pollute a crucial source of the state's surface waters. Approach denies that, saying it will use a closed-loop system and truck waste away from drilling sites.

Oil Conservation Division spokeswoman Jodi McGinnis Porter said a hearing officer would soon begin reviewing transcripts from hearings on the Approach permits and make a recommendation to the division's director.

Santa Fe County spokesman Stephen Ulibarri did not return calls for comment last week.

Wells versus wildlife: Drill plan draws flak
Additional Pinedale Mesa rigs will hurt grouse and deer, pollute air, conservationists say.

By Cory Hatch Jackson Hole, Wyo.
July 2, 2008
A plan for drilling roughly 3,700 additional wells on the Pinedale Mesa would allow development to hurt wildlife populations, conservation groups and Sublette County residents say.

Critics also say the Pinedale Anticline drilling plan, released last week, contains language that allows industry to get out of commitments that would help protect the environment. The Bureau of Land Management said Friday the plan would go into effect in late July.

This planned increase, from about 700 wells currently allowed to 4,399, comes after researchers and state and federal agencies have documented contaminated water supplies, ozone violations and wildlife losses since approval of the original 2000 plan to drill on the mesa.

The mesa rises above the anticline about 100 miles south of Jackson in Sublette County. It is considered important winter wildlife habitat – deer that summer on Snow King Mountain winter there – and has been closed to humans, but not industry, in the winter.

The new plan would allow year-round drilling to continue. Further, it would allow 15 to 30 percent declines in population numbers and habitat for mule deer, pronghorn, sage grouse and sensitive species before efforts begin to stop any loss.

Mule deer and sage grouse populations have already experienced unacceptable losses since the 2005 baseline described in the plan, said Linda Baker, an organizer with the Upper Green River Valley Coalition.

“I am concerned that the mitigation for wildlife would only occur if the population falls an additional 15 percent,” she said. “We had already achieved a 25 to 46 percent decline by 2005. That would mean a severe reduction before any mitigation is attempted. Biologically, I don’t find that the wisest management policy.”

She said the Bureau of Land Management persists with development around sage grouse leks, despite scientific evidence that these sage grouse are declining and need more space when displaying for mates in these sensitive staging grounds during breeding season. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is currently considering a proposal to protect sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act.

The anticline development plan would allow a 30 percent drop in the number of active sage grouse leks or a 30 percent decline in the number of males displaying on leks. The plan comes as Wyoming state officials have dedicated millions of dollars to protect the bird.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department conservation plan is to prevent further decline and to increase numbers, not to allow declines, she said.

For air quality, Baker said that industry has already violated standards for nitrogen oxides, and the Pinedale area received a number of ozone warnings this past winter. She said industry’s commitment to using the drill rigs with the best available technology is too little too late.
“On the positive side, it seems like BLM has finally admitted that they have the authority to reduce the pace of development, but they would only do that if the suggested technological innovation doesn’t work,” she said. “There is nothing wrong with Americans asking and expecting that the best available technology be used in these environmentally sensitive areas. [Best available technology] is being used in other places, where in Wyoming it’s being used as a bargaining chip.”

Both Baker and Steve Belinda, an energy policy expert with the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership who once worked for Pinedale BLM, said the plan is rife with ambiguous language that allows industry to work around commitments to wildlife and the environment.

“I am over being burned with this language play,” Baker said. “I want a commitment. BLM has the responsibility to make sure that when they approve a number of wells they are complying with federal law, such as the Clean Air Act.”

Belinda said similar “weasel words” in the 2000 plan resulted in a failure to implement steps once air quality and wildlife began to suffer.

“Some of the smaller stuff got implemented, but it was a fight,” he said. “We’ve got dirty air, dirty water, and we’re losing our wildlife. In the end, hunters will be the first to lose.”

The plan for the Pinedale Anticline now includes language that commits industry to keeping ozone levels below what would trigger an air quality violation, said Caleb Hiner, a BLM planning and environmental coordinator for the Pinedale BLM office.

“BLM has committed to ensuring that this project will not commit an ozone violation,” he said. “We didn’t specify the exact measures that would be taken to achieve that.”

Hiner said the basic elements of the plan remain the same as the draft supplemental environmental impact statement released in late December, namely about 250 new well pads for a total of 600 in a 45,415-acre core area. The core area is surrounded by a half-mile “potential development area” amounting to 24,875 acres.

To the east, the three operators, Ultra, Shell and Questar, would not develop roughly 49,900 acres for five years. The plan would also hold off on leasing 37,000 acres on the Pinedale Mesa until the Pinedale Resource Management Plan is completed later this year or in early 2009.

In exchange for these delays in drilling, the new plan would eliminate seasonal restrictions on drilling that conservation groups say are necessary to prevent losses to big game such as mule deer, pronghorn and moose. Hines said the five-year restriction on the 49,900 acres is part of a mitigation package that would help limit wildlife losses.

Other environmental mitigation efforts include the construction of liquids gathering systems and remote monitoring, which would both limit truck traffic to the well pads. Ultra, Shell and Questar would set up a “compensatory mitigation fund” that would entail an initial commitment of $4.2 million plus roughly $1.8 million each year based on the number of
wells initiated on the Anticline. The fund would not exceed $36 million.

Hiner acknowledged that wildlife on the mesa has already declined, including a 46 percent decline in the mule deer population.

“The declining mule deer population, that’s always been an issue since the beginning of this document,” he said.

Pinedale resident David Smith said BLM’s plan offers little for people in Sublette County. The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality issued a number of ozone warnings for the Pinedale area this past winter, prompting protests from citizens.

“We’ve been screaming bloody murder down here in Pinedale,” he said. “All [the BLM] is concerned about is leasing.”

Smith called promises about air quality “lip service,” and said that industry’s promise to use the best available technology to reduce emissions amounts to blackmail. “They are not going to enforce their own policies, standards and guidelines,” he said. “Industry gets anything it wants.”

In a joint statement, Ultra, Shell and Questar praised the decision.

“We are pleased that the SEIS is progressing and that we have reached this milestone,” industry officials said last week. “We are looking forward to a timely Record of Decision that allows implementation of the improved development plan so the communities and the environment can realize the associated benefits.”

Wyoming has the right to preserve special places

Sunday, July 6, 2008 2:06 AM MDT
Star-Tribune Editorial Board

As gasoline prices continue to rise, Americans are changing their opinions about how to solve the current energy crisis.

A Pew Research Center report in February found that 35 percent of the public wanted to expand exploration, mining and drilling of oil and gas. In June, that number increased to 47 percent and will likely go higher as prices at the pump soar.

Half of all Americans, according to the survey, now favor drilling in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge. Fewer people seem concerned about wildlife when backers of ANWR drilling note that the exploration could eventually bring down gas prices, as well as reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

With its huge reserves of oil and gas, Wyoming is also a prominent player in the drilling debate. But make no mistake: Our state has, and will continue, to do more than its fair share to provide energy to this nation. In addition to oil and gas, Wyoming is the largest producer of coal in the country. And with its abundant wind and solar resources, the state is on the verge of becoming a major player in the quest for renewable energy.

If anyone thinks Wyoming isn't pulling its weight, remember this statistic: About 94 percent of public lands in Wyoming under the control of the Bureau of Land Management are open to oil and gas drilling. That's a total of 17 million acres.

While other states have tightened their bureaucratic control over energy exploration by passing laws to prevent drilling, Wyoming has done everything in its power to increase production. Our state can't be expected to solve all of the nation's energy woes.

Mineral production is the basis of the state's economy. It provides high-paying jobs and revenue for ample government services. The state has a strong interest in doing what it can to see that the industry continues to prosper.

But considering the amount of minerals produced in the state, it's definitely not out of line for Wyoming to request that some special areas be made off-limits to oil and gas drilling. In fact, it's the duty of state officials to do so, as Wyoming continues to seek growth on its own terms.

Two of those areas are the Wyoming Range in the western part of the state and Adobe Town in the southern Red Desert. Gov. Dave Freudenthal has gone to bat for both, arguing that the state should be able to protect its tourism industry and preserve critical habitat for wildlife.

We expect that many people in other parts of the country won't be able to appreciate the value Wyoming citizens place on their wildlife. And if they think more drilling will keep $6 a gallon gas prices away, they'll be more than happy to recommend increased exploration in Wyoming -- particularly if the ANWR project is ever approved.
We urge Wyoming officials here and in Washington to stand their ground, and protect our heritage. Wyoming has long been one of the first places companies look for new drilling opportunities, and the state will continue to serve the nation's interests. But it's time for the state to say, "Look somewhere else for a change."

It's a critical time for sage grouse

Sunday, July 6, 2008 2:06 AM MDT

BRIAN RUTLEDGE
Perspective

On Friday, June 27, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s comment period for the listing of the Greater Sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act closed. While Audubon Wyoming supports the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's process, this institution remains skeptical as to the Bureau of Land Management’s intention to take the steps necessary to protect this species.

If the Department of the Interior fails to implement the recommendations of the State of Wyoming Sage grouse Implementation Team for conservation of sage grouse core areas in the next few months, a listing of the bird under the Endangered Species Act may be inevitable.

The State of Wyoming has produced a "Core Area Management Plan" for the Greater Sage grouse that, if implemented by the Bureau of Land Management in the next few months, could avert a listing of the species. However, the agency and the oil and gas industry have maintained a "business as usual approach" to sage grouse conservation, generating skepticism among conservationists.

The unbroken sagebrush country, that provides crucial habitat for the Greater Sage grouse, is one of the most awe-inspiring landscapes of the Rocky Mountain West. Places that we know and love as citizens -- places such as the Red Desert, the Upper Green River Valley and the Powder River Basin -- support the sage grouse and numerous other sage-dependent species such as antelope, the Pygmy Rabbit, the Ferruginous Hawk and the Long-billed Curlew. The energy boom now gripping Wyoming is exerting tremendous pressure on the sage grouse as well as the world-class hunting and recreation opportunities these same lands
provide us.

However, the road to protecting the sage grouse is paved with good intentions. We are on the brink of a listing of the Greater Sage grouse in Wyoming. BLM and industry have to wake up today and take decisive action to avoid a train wreck in the making. A reconsideration on the pace of leasing and stipulations for development, based on peer-reviewed science, could avert the necessity for an ESA listing. Actions speak loudly and performance, as of today, leaves grave doubt of their positive intentions. Whatever the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decides, its decision must be based on performance and policy, not expressed intent.

The Greater Sage grouse, once common throughout the American West, has dwindled to a fraction of its former population. Currently 95.5 percent of BLM lands in Wyoming are open to mineral leasing and oil and gas development. Sage grouse "core areas" that provide key habitat to the species encompass 23 percent of the state.

If the BLM and industry decide to seriously consider the recommendations of the State of Wyoming, development would still be allowed in these areas, but with effective mitigation requirements in place. A decision on whether to list the Greater Sage grouse is expected from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by December.

We look forward to working with BLM and industry during the critical months ahead of us. We can accomplish the realization of energy development, while maintaining the character and quality of our land. We trust that the decision-makers will not squander this opportunity to do the right thing. Brian A. Rutledge of Laramie is executive director of Audubon Wyoming.
Ritter, in an interview with The Associated Press Wednesday, said he believes the industry “can absolutely thrive” in Colorado.

“Oil is at $140-plus barrel,” Ritter said.

Natural gas prices have increased several times over, he added.

The proposed overhaul of Colorado’s oil and gas regulations amid a natural gas boom is intended to allow the industry to continue to flourish while looking out for the state’s wildlife, air, water and communities, Ritter said.

“We really have to keep striving for this balance,” Ritter said.

“We should not expect that Colorado would somehow bail us out of an energy crisis, for lack of a better word, on the backs of the Colorado mountains or trout streams or elk and deer herds.”

A record 6,368 drilling permits were issued last year — about six times the total in 1999 — and more are expected this year.

The Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, the main regulatory body, is expected to vote in August on rules implementing laws requiring that the environment, wildlife and public health and safety be given more consideration when approving development.

Before hearings last month on the rules, two trade groups launched an ad campaign calling the proposals “a looming threat to Colorado’s economy” that would threaten thousands of jobs and shut down drilling in some areas for three months every year because of wildlife concerns.

“I’m very disappointed in the industry,” Ritter said.

“We’re in the middle of a serious, collaborative process that involved decision-making by this commission and that commission is working very hard to hear the voice of industry.”

Ritter said the process, which began in January with the release of preliminary rules, has been one of the most open and public that he can remember.

He said he doesn’t believe everyone in the industry, including some chief executives, agrees with the message from the Colorado Oil and Gas Association and the Colorado Petroleum Association, the groups behind the radio and newspaper ads.

“I listened to the people of this state as I campaigned, and I don’t want to see a single job lost as a result of the regulatory practices, the regulatory scheme that is ultimately decided upon,” said Ritter, who took office in January 2007.

Meg Collins, president of the oil and gas association, said the industry still has serious concerns about the rule-making process.
She said representatives from the industry and other interest groups who attended meetings earlier this year were working from “concepts and assumptions” rather than solid proposals.

“We did not feel our input was significantly reflected in the draft rules put out Mach 31,” Collins said.

She also defended the ads targeting the proposed rules.

“One of the reasons we decided to go forward with the ad campaign was to elevate the issue and broaden the base of folks being informed,” Collins said.

“I’m sorry the governor’s disappointed. Frankly, we’re disappointed, too.”

Critics, including state officials, dispute the ads’ claim that proposed wildlife protections will shut down drilling for 90 days during mating and birthing seasons.

They say companies could avoid seasonal restrictions by drafting comprehensive plans that include wildlife protections, drilling fewer wells or consulting with state wildlife experts.

Critics also question the roughly 71,000 jobs claimed by the oil and gas industry in the ads.

The trade groups base the number on a 2006 state-funded study, but economists with the state and environmental groups say the figure is likely much lower when loosely related jobs aren’t counted.

Hunt report hits leasing

By Cory Hatch, Jackson Hole, Wyo.

Date: July 10, 2008

The Bush administration’s policies on energy development and wildlife management threaten hunting opportunities for Americans, according to a draft report commissioned by the president’s own Interior Department.

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, a watchdog group, released the draft
The 84-page document was compiled by experts selected by Interior Secretary Gale Norton before she retired in 2006.

The Sporting Conservation Council, which oversaw the report, consisted of groups considered friendly to the Bush administration such as the National Rifle Association and Safari Club International. The report criticizes Bush administration policies in areas such as wildlife management, wetlands and energy development.

In the section on energy development, written by representatives from Questar, Shell, The Nature Conservancy and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, the authors label the issue a “major wildlife concern” for states such as Wyoming, Utah and Montana. A leasing push has taken place in those areas with development chewing up wildlife habitat.

In the region, Sublette County south of Jackson has seen development of the Jonah and Pinedale Anticline gas fields. Development of winter habitat, some used by Jackson Hole wildlife, has been a concern there.

“These areas also contain some of the best game/wildlife [and hunting] habitats in the West and their future as prime habitat in the face of actual or potential energy development is uncertain,” the report says.

The authors say the Energy Policy Act of 2005 has directed Bureau of Land Management to expand the domestic production of oil and gas.

“Given the magnitude of present and anticipated energy development in the West, it is doubtful that game/wildlife species and associated habitat values can be maintained without increased interagency cooperation, reducing on-site impact and developing landscape-scale efforts to enhance habitats off site,” the report states. “If improved collaboration and landscape-scale habitat efforts including analysis and decision-making are not implemented, it is unlikely that meaningful balance between energy development and wildlife and hunting can be maintained or achieved.”

In a list of goals, the authors say BLM should consider temporary deferral of energy leasing “to preserve options for game/wildlife species, populations and habitat conservation.”

The report also says oil and gas leasing has resulted in a loss of sagebrush habitat.

As for wildlife management, the report says federal wildlife agencies have suffered from a lack of funding and a lack of science-based decision making.

“The ability of federal and state fish and wildlife agencies to maintain wildlife habitats and populations at levels consistent with public expectations and to conserve imperiled species, on both public and private lands, is eroding,” the report states.

Jeff Ruch, executive director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, said the report is ironic in that it comes from groups that are friendly to the Bush administration.

“We get the impression that the group wasn’t going out of its way to be confrontational,” he
said. “But even in their polite version they were somewhat scathing.”

It was hard finding even allies that had good things to say.”

For oil and gas leasing, Ruch said interagency cooperation is one area that conservation groups have cited problems for years.

“So from the point of view of the state agencies, it’s reached the point where it’s no use to talk federal counterparts because the federal agencies are ordered to sign off the drilling permits no matter how bad they are,” he said.

Such has been the case with Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal, who recently blasted a BLM plan for management of land in Sublette County. The Governor, who had an opportunity to address his concerns to the federal agency before the report is finalized, instead issued a statement criticizing the BLM plan in public.

The report by the Sporting Conservation Council is the result of President Bush’s executive order 13443, signed in August of 2007 to facilitate hunting and wildlife conservation.

---

**Results from sampling Parachute Creek still months away**

*DOW testing fish, insects after four waste discharges by gas companies*

*By Phillip Yates*

Glenwood Springs, CO Colorado

July 13, 2008

PARACHUTE, Colorado — The Colorado Division of Wildlife is getting closer to finishing sampling of fish and the insects they thrive on in Parachute Creek in the wake of four oil and gas industry spills earlier this year.

It may take another three months for that data to show whether fish populations in the creek may have been affected by the spills, said Randy Hampton, a spokesman for the DOW.

The agency began analyzing the current population and species distribution of the creek’s fish — which include native Colorado cutthroat trout and brook, brown and rainbow trout — after four spills of water used in drilling operations occurred near Garden Guleh, which is northwest of Parachute. Runoff from melting snow in Garden Guleh flows into Parachute Creek.

The Environmental Protection Agency and the state’s Water Quality Control Division sampling of the area, which occurred about two months after the last release occurred,
revealed that the spills did not cause any lingering environmental impacts and did not violate state drinking water standards.

Hampton said DOW officials sampled three sites on Parachute Creek in mid-April and two sites in Garden Gulch. Both fish and the insects they feed on were sampled in Parachute Creek, but in Garden Gulch, agency officials conducted insect sampling.

The agency conducted additional fish and insect sampling on July 2 and July 3 in both Parachute Creek and Garden Gulch. The DOW is also planning on further sampling closer to the town of Parachute next week, Hampton said.

It will be sometime in September or October before the agency can make a determination about whether the fish population in Parachute Creek now is different compared to historic levels in the wake of the four spills, he said.

The DOW analyzed fish populations in the creek by “electro-fishing,” where an agency employee uses a long probe that sends “an electrical stimulation” that stuns fish momentarily. The fish then float to surface and can be measured and classified.

The fish revive from the shock and are released back into the water. The DOW employee is protected from the shock by wearing specially-made waders — waterproof boots fishermen use while fishing in a river.

---

**Bush-appointed sportsmen offer conservation ideas**

By MEAD GRUVER  
Associated Press Writer

Monday, July 14, 2008 2:05 AM MDT

CHEYENNE -- An advisory group appointed by the Bush administration says hunters and fishermen -- touted as the nation's first conservationists -- ought to continue to play an important role as advocates for conserving wildlife and habitat.
But the Sporting Conservation Council says conflicting government policies, dwindling interest in hunting, and growing threats to big game, fish and fowl populations have made that role a more challenging one.

The council recently released a package of draft reports outlining those concerns and possible long-term policy solutions. Drawn from expert testimony at a conference in Denver in April, the reports will be the starting point for a planned presidential conference on wildlife policy in Washington, D.C., this fall.

The goal is a 10-year, national wildlife management policy.

Council members said such long-term planning will require bipartisanship -- and they've even reached out to both the John McCain and Barack Obama campaigns with the assumption that one of the two will soon be in a position to enact their recommendations.

"I hope succeeding administrations will take a look at this and say, `Here are some people who dug into this and here are some of the things they said could be done. Why don't we tackle four or five of them, or 10 or 20 of them?'" said council member John Tomke, president of Ducks Unlimited-Mexico.

Council created in '06

Former Interior Secretary Gale Norton created the 12-member council in 2006, drawing mainly from representatives of hunting groups. President Bush signed an executive order last year asking the council for ideas to promote hunting and wildlife conservation.

The council looked at threats to wildlife habitat and wildlife populations, including from energy development in the West. One report suggested that state and federal wildlife agencies collaborate to set goals for big-game populations and for protecting habitat before and during energy development, such as on Wyoming's Pinedale Anticline.

The report by Steve Mealey, a former supervisor of Wyoming's Shoshone National Forest, also suggested that the U.S. Bureau of Land Management exercise its ability, when necessary, to put land temporarily off-limits to oil and gas drilling.

Mealey also was behind a report that examined how global warming could affect hunting and fishing. The report called for more research into how climate change could affect wildlife.

An environmental group, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, issued a press release Wednesday characterizing the Sporting Conservation Council's reports as critical of Bush administration policies. The release quoted the oil and gas report, which said that drilling had become "a major wildlife concern."

"Principles of ecosystem management are the exact opposite of the Bush approach, which reduces natural resources to the special interests dedicated to their exploitation," the group's executive director, Jeff Ruch, said in the release.
Nonpartisan reports

But council members said their reports were scrupulously nonpartisan.

"We saw this as an opportunity to add real value to some good intent on the administration's part," Mealey said. "They were very sincere about asking how can we do things better and we took that very, very literally. We weren't a bunch of stone-throwers."

The premise of all of the Sporting Conservation Council reports is that hunters and fishermen have played an important role in modern conservation. They helped create what's now called the "North American Model of Wildlife Conservation," which provides that anyone -- not just the wealthy elite -- should have the right and be able to hunt and fish, according to the report.

But the council worries that as interest in hunting declines, Americans are also becoming less concerned about maintaining wildlife and habitat.

A decrease in hunting could mean less revenue generated for wildlife management through taxes on the sale of hunting gear and through the sale of state hunting licenses, the report said.

Tomke, with Ducks Unlimited, said a possible solution is encouraging youngsters to take up hunting and fishing -- even though children nowadays are more involved in structured activities such as organized team sports.

"One of the recommendations of our group is to create more structured activities for outdoor recreation -- hunting, recreational shooting, fishing -- on federal lands," Tomke said.

In another of the reports, council member Daniel Dessecker, a biologist with the Ruffed Grouse Society, recommended improving collaboration between federal, state and tribal land management and wildlife agencies. His report on habitat conservation said government agencies often have different goals for habitat and wildlife populations.