

A Balanced Approach

What People Are Saying About Oil and Gas Drilling in Wyoming's Upper Green River Valley

While acknowledging the energy industry's important role in the region's economy, many Sublette County residents, scientists and public officials are calling for a more balanced approach to future oil and gas development. Many are unwilling to see the superb wildlife habitat and open spaces of the Upper Green River Valley become an industrialized landscape. Instead, they see a need for new drilling to be paced and placed in a way that will conserve the natural values of this corner of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem for future generations.

"The same national energy economy that fills our coffers could inadvertently turn our state into a water and wildlife wasteland. This is no time to reduce our efforts to protect our environment, our water and our wildlife. Do we want future generations to conclude that those of us in this hall traded the Wyoming heritage for a few years of high government revenues and low personal taxes? I think not."

-- Wyoming **Gov. Dave Freudenthal** in his 2004 State of the State speech

Local Residents Voice Concerns

Sublette County residents, business operators and ranchers wonder what will happen to their communities and the land as BLM considers a new management plan that could allow up to 10,000 new wells, two to three times the current number operating.

- *"Sublette County has a rich and proud heritage of oil and gas development. But today, we're taking a stand against the future development of oil and gas (on federal land) in Sublette County."* **Rob Shaul**, editor Pinedale Roundup (editorial, 5/22/03).
- *"The damage done to the aesthetics of our ranch and the surrounding areas that will occur as a result of the proposed South Piney Natural Gas Development Project will directly affect the viability of my business."* **Gudrid Espenscheid**, Big Piney rancher (Pinedale Roundup, 9/4/04).
- *"I've seen antelope coming through here for fifty years. I'd like to see them for another fifty years."* **Gordon Johnston**, Sublette County commissioner (High Country News, 8/18/03).
- *"When the prices plummet, and eventually they will, the companies will be gone quicker than fire through a gas line, and all of us will be left picking up the pieces of our destroyed local economy, not to mention the plunder and pillage of our public lands."* **Maggie Palmer**, business owner, Pinedale (Pinedale Roundup, 6/5/03).
- *"I do not oppose reasonable development that is balanced with other essential considerations. However, the amount of development in the Green River resource area is not balanced. It is excessive."* **Donald Duerr**, Pinedale resident (Pinedale Roundup, 9/4/03).
- *"Unlike public land where we do lose our heritage, what you lose with this is your family asset."* **John Andrikopoulos**, Sublette County rancher, speaking about drilling on his ranch (Jackson Hole News and Guide, 3/31/04).

Biologists and Sportsmen Urge Caution

Wyoming's world-class wildlife depends on healthy winter range and open migration routes. Excessive oil and gas development could undermine both in the Upper Green River Valley, according to some hunters and scientists. This region features some of the largest expanses of wildlife winter range in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, hosting more than 100,000 big game animals, including pronghorn, mule deer, bighorn sheep, elk and moose. It also harbors crucial migration corridors, including those used by Grand Teton National Park's pronghorn, whose biannual treks are believed to be the longest overland migration of any game species in the lower 48 states. Much of this migration is funneled through vulnerable "bottlenecks," which oil and gas drilling threatens to close, biologists warn.

- *"If we don't do something to assure the continuance of the migration, what we'll be saying is that it's OK to let a species go extinct in a national park."* Biologist **Joel Berger** of the Wildlife Conservation Society on the importance of migration corridors to pronghorn in Grand Teton National Park (Los Angeles Times, 2/29/04).
- The **Wyoming Game and Fish Department** regards the Trapper's Point bottleneck as the state's highest conservation priority. In an Aug. 2, 2002 letter to the BLM, wildlife officials stated: *"The Department is gravely concerned with the proposed leasing and potential development of BLM lands in the Trapper's Point area west of Pinedale ... Any activities or additional surface disturbance in this corridor could be detrimental."*
- Biologist **Clait Braun** predicts oil and gas development will lead to a 50 to 90 percent decline in sage grouse populations in the short term and a 50 to 60 percent decline in the long term. (Pinedale Roundup 4/1/04) *"Wyoming, in general, has the strongest sage grouse population in the world. Fragmentation of the habitats upon which this population depends will slowly unravel the entire presently linked sage grouse population in Wyoming,"* he told the Jackson Hole News and Guide (3/19/03).
- *"The whole basin is getting chewed up. Folks have always had the view, 'Let's develop here and the animals can go over there.' We're starting to get to the point now that there is no 'over there.'"* **Hall Sawyer**, wildlife biologist (Los Angeles Times 2/29/04).
- *"It is very clear to me that a threat exists and a frightening future for wildlife in the Green River Basin if we don't come to grips with this fairly quickly. Wildlife is a huge portion of Wyoming's soul, and it's not for sale."* **Craig Thompson**, Rock Springs hunter (Jackson Hole News & Guide, 3/31/04)

State-Wide Support for a More Balanced Approach in the Upper Green:

Wyoming voters favor limits on oil and gas drilling to protect communities and the land, air, water and wildlife that make Wyoming special. In a 2003 statewide poll, a majority (57%) opposes oil and natural gas drilling in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and even more (69%) favor restrictions to protect access to public lands, wildlife habitat, air quality, open space and recreational opportunities. (Decision Research 2003 poll)

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Contact the Upper Green River Valley Coalition's Lauren McKeever (307-367-8472) or Linda Baker (307-367-3670), or visit www.uppergreen.org.