

# The Upper Green River Valley Coalition

## *Responsible Energy Development Proposal*

### -- Answers to Common Questions --

#### **For more information:**

Visit: [www.uppergreen.org](http://www.uppergreen.org)

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#### ▪ **What is the Responsible Energy Development proposal?**

Seeking to preserve the Upper Green's priceless rural heritage, local residents and conservation groups have released a common-sense plan, the *Responsible Energy Development proposal*. This "Doing It Right" plan calls for balancing natural gas production with protecting air and water quality, preserving habitat for one of America's finest wildlife areas, and perpetuating the many economic benefits stemming from the valley's wildlife and recreation resources. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has a responsibility manage this region's public land in a way that addresses the needs of the *entire* community, as well as those of industry.

#### ▪ **Why is the proposal important now?**

The BLM is revising the management plan for its 1.2 million-acre holdings in the Pinedale area. The draft plan is due for release this fall. This region, which features vital habitat for some of America's largest free-roaming herds of pronghorn antelope and mule deer, faces increasing threats from fast-paced energy extraction. There are deep community concerns that the federal land in the valley is managed primarily for the energy industry. The 15-year-old land management plan that the BLM is operating under is woefully out of date, produced at a time when energy extraction was in its infancy in the Upper Green. Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal recently protested leasing in this area, citing the need for guidance from an updated management plan and a more balanced approach.

#### ▪ **Is this really a local effort or just an attempt to stop energy development?**

Local residents support the *Responsible Energy Development* plan and are endorsing it in growing numbers. The BLM has a responsibility to listen to local concerns about energy development. Supporters of the plan look forward to working with the BLM and their neighbors about how to manage energy development in a way that protects our quality of life, the air we breath and the water that we all rely on. As more folks learn about this plan, we look forward to a dialogue in Sublette County about how best to proceed for our future.

#### ▪ **Doesn't this proposal amount to "locking up" most of the Upper Green and preventing future energy development?**

No one believes that energy development won't continue to be a large player in the Upper Green. **For example, natural gas already so thoroughly dominates the region that more than 75 percent of BLM's 1.2 million-acre Pinedale Resource Area is under lease.** That means three-fourths of the valley's BLM land can be now legally developed for oil or gas extraction. The agency's *Reasonable Foreseeable Development* scenario calls for 7,000 to 10,000 new wells in the next 10 to 15 years, more than triple the number of existing wells.

▪ **What are some of the best management practices (BMPs) listed in the Proposal?**

Industry can lessen its impact on the environment and wildlife. “Doing it right” entails:

- Clustering infrastructure so that fewer miles of pipelines, power lines and roads are required.
- Drilling directionally when possible so that multiple wells can be sunk from a common pad.
- Phasing in development.
- Respecting surface property rights in split estate situations.
- Keeping development out of riparian areas and aquifer recharge zones.
- Respect seasonal drilling closures designed to protect wildlife during sensitive periods in these animals’ life cycles.
- Using state-of-the-art technology to reduce emissions, such as “flareless” well completions.

▪ **Will these practices make drilling in the Upper Green prohibitively expensive?**

No. “Doing it right” will add to the cost of development, but these measures should be considered a reasonable cost of tapping a lucrative resource owned by all Americans. Remember that industry annually extracts more than \$2 billion worth of natural gas from the Upper Green. The energy resources here are so profitable, energy companies must be held to a high standard of environmental conduct. When the wells eventually run dry, shouldn’t these companies be expected to leave the Valley in as good a condition as when the boom began?

▪ **What are drilling stipulations?**

During the winter, mule deer and pronghorn gather by the thousands on the Pinedale Anticline and other areas designated by wildlife officials as “crucial winter range.” The valley is dotted with sage grouse nesting grounds and mating areas, known as leks. To avoid disturbing these animals, industry is required to cease its drilling operations during vulnerable phases in these species’ life cycles. But BLM routinely grants exemptions to give drillers more time to get their rigs out of stipulation areas. Some areas are so sensitive to the Upper Green’s big game populations they should either never be leased or protected with “no surface occupancy” rules.

▪ **What are the economic benefits of *Doing It Right*?**

The valley’s natural attributes help support 1,600 jobs in fields such as tourism, outfitting and ranching. Furthermore, wildlife-based recreation generates \$634 million in annual expenditures in Wyoming, comprising the second leading source of income to the state. For the Pinedale area, **that income amounts to \$72 million**, according to the state Game and Fish Department. Studies show that prosperous Western communities are close to protected public lands, not industrial landscapes.

▪ **Why is balance important to our way of life?**

Natural gas is important to Wyoming – and to the nation. But so is our ranching heritage, our great rivers and fisheries, our healthy big game herds, and good, clean air. To protect the things that make Wyoming special, drilling in the Upper Green must be done at the right pace and in the right place.

▪ **What can I do to help promote responsible energy development?**

Endorse the *Responsible Energy Development* proposal by contacting Coalition staff or by clicking the “endorsement” link on the Coalition’s web page ([www.uppergreen.org](http://www.uppergreen.org)). Attend meetings, submit comments to the BLM and write letters to Wyoming’s congressional delegation, your newspaper and the governor. With good planning and communication, we can provide for continued energy development while also protecting our quality of life, wildlife, air and water.