



## **Speakers call for better planning**

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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 large-scale 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.