

# Pinedale Roundup

*Newspaper of the Upper Green River Valley*

## Can balance be achieved?

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*Published: June 19th, 2008, Pinedale Roundup, Page 6*

Balance. It's a word being used to describe the energy development in the Pinedale Anticline.

But can balance be achieved in our valley? Over the past year, Pinedale, Sublette County and Wyoming have been blitzed by an industry campaign that promises "Year round access on the Pinedale Anticline will provide balance between natural gas development and wildlife." A lot of money is being spent to convince us that we are wrong in our belief that balance is being ignored.

Any day now, we can expect the release of the final supplemental environmental impact statement for the Anticline, which would greatly expand current development and remove many wildlife protections to accommodate year-round drilling. At about the same time, we should anticipate the final resource management plan for the Pinedale BLM, which our governor already has strongly criticized. Many citizens have commented on these two documents, objecting to the lack of balance for other values besides energy development. In my 15 years attempting to achieve "balance" in Wyoming energy development, I never have seen major changes in a project because of public input. I predict these documents will not meet public expectations and that most of our input will be ignored. In the end, industry will get everything it wants.

Our air-quality crisis in Sublette County has galvanized frustrated locals who are upset with BLM and industry attempts to address the problem. Who is offering solutions? At a recent conference on energy development, Gov. Freudenthal called the issue very serious and suggested that the next phase of development should present less of a problem because it would be more controlled by regulation and process. The draft document I read had less regulation and process!

Let's examine the record of performance by the BLM and industry.

In formulating the management plan for development of the Anticline, the BLM committed itself and industry to processes that the agency concluded were essential to develop the region in an environmentally sensitive manner, one that complied with BLM obligations under federal law. They called this approach "adaptive environmental management," or AEM, and it was supposed to be a process that would address concerns such as wildlife, air quality and water quality.

Through AEM, the Pinedale Anticline Working Group (PAWG) was established

to implement monitoring programs, review monitoring data, evaluate effectiveness of protection measures and mitigation, and recommend changes to the BLM that would lessen impacts to important natural resources. The working group also would participate in industry planning and determine whether those plans could meet project objectives.

The PAWG tried, but it was doomed from the start. Even the group's best efforts were unable to bring balance to the Anticline project. Mule deer use of the Mesa has decreased by more than 40 percent since development began. To stave off further losses, the PAWG recommended establishing two primary goals: no additional net loss of wintering deer and no further loss of useable winter habitat. Yet the BLM rejected these recommendations, about the same time approving increased activity to drill year-round in crucial mule deer winter range. For some PAWG members, this rejection was a discouraging confirmation that AEM had indeed failed, and many stopped participating.

If this process functioned properly, some balance could be achieved on the Anticline. But the PAWG exists in name only; it cannot operate for lack of a quorum and will not have enough members to proceed until late this fall. Eight years after development began, the process to ensure balance has never functioned properly! The BLM has failed the people of Sublette County. Is this balance? Will more of the same restore balance?

Implementation of the new proposal for the Anticline could bring some positive changes, but the plan is nevertheless deeply flawed, despite industry's claims to the contrary. Reduced wildlife protections, exemption from previous commitments and a watered-down AEM process are some of what we can look forward to. Once again, industry pledges to take corrective action, but only after additional damage is confirmed and only if industry itself agrees to change. A hefty mitigation check is included, but this could be seen as industry buying what it wants. The public has no assurance that any of these promises will be kept, and given industry's past performance on the Anticline, I have serious doubts myself.

Fundamentally, the Pinedale Anticline project is a question about how to responsibly develop these tremendous energy resources and not sacrifice our other natural resources. The new proposal falls short at balancing energy development with fish and wildlife and values like hunting and fishing.

Some suggest that "responsible" and "balance" are hard to define. For me, it's easy we don't sacrifice one resource or value for the sake of another. More affirmative actions and commitments must be made in advance of energy development to assure that other resources are sustained through the life of the project and are intact for our use and enjoyment after development ends. That is the balance not offered by the proposal for the expanded development of the Anticline and in many energy projects in Wyoming and the Rocky Mountains. We can achieve balance, but it needs to work for everyone, not just industry.

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