

# BLM approves winter drilling

Questar will drill six  
wells on three pads  
beginning next year

By **WHITNEY ROYSTER**  
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reporter*

**JACKSON** — Year-round drilling for natural gas will be allowed on lands identified as crucial deer winter range, federal officials decided.

Prill Mecham, the Bureau of Land Management's Pinedale Field Office director, agreed to allow Questar Exploration and Development Co. to drill six wells from three pads for nine years during winter months, starting next winter, in the Pinedale Anticline field.

This winter, Questar will be allowed to operate one pad, as the company has mitigation measures to put in place before the full winter operation is allowed.

The anticline stretches from just northwest of Pinedale for about 30 miles to the southwest.

"We're very pleased with the result," Ron Hogan, Pinedale project manager for Questar, said Wednesday. "It's going to be a good, positive thing for the folks who have to manage the wildlife and the habitat and have to be concerned about total disturbance. We'll minimize that over the long haul."

Although year-round drilling was supported by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and Gov. Dave Freudenthal, conservationists generally opposed the plan because its effect on deer was unknown. They said the plan risked a

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# DRILLING

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catastrophic die-off of deer unable to survive the difficult winter months.

Marisa Martin, an attorney with the Lander-based Wyoming Outdoor Council, said more study of the effect of winter drilling on mule deer is required during Questar's tenure, and if there is a problem, it needs to stop.

"It may be too late to do anything after nine years," she said.

The BLM told Questar it had to complete construction of a 107-mile, 6-inch-diameter pipeline to transport condensate and to coordinate the winter-drilling well pad locations with the BLM and Game and Fish Department, as the company has proposed.

The company has also said it will bus work crews to and from the winter pads to minimize traffic, and it will use low-emission engines on all its drilling rigs by 2007. Questar has also said it will complete habitat enhancement projects on nonproductive portions of its leased land.

BLM is allowing the company its requested three pads with two rigs each after the mitigation measures are completed — likely next summer.

This winter BLM is allowing operation of one drill pad to support ongoing winter drilling research, as was allowed last year.

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MARISA MARTIN, ATTORNEY WITH THE WYOMING OUTDOOR COUNCIL

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it's a good start," Martin said. "We're cautious about the impact on mule deer, because winter restrictions are there for a reason."

Martin said her group would help more thoroughly examine effects on mule deer, along with Questar and the BLM. She said current studies look at where the animals are rather than stress factors.

Hogan said Questar will continue to study winter drilling effects under the direction of the BLM and Game and Fish.

Questar's approved winter operations are scaled back from its normal summer activity. Currently, the company has 52 pads, with nine planned, with about two rigs on each pad.

The BLM has approved 150 pads for the company.

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