

## CASPER STAR TRIBUNE

April 24, 2005

### **Don't wait to protect air quality**

Air quality could be the hammer that nails a lid on Wyoming's energy boom. So we'd better take the issue seriously, and quickly.

A new report by the Greater Yellowstone Clean Air Partnership identifies management of increased emissions from energy development as the most pressing threat to air quality in the Greater Yellowstone area. Even though air quality in the area is still considered "generally excellent," the potential for impairment by rapid energy development must not be overlooked.

Already Wyoming has seen hints of what could be ahead if air quality issues aren't addressed early. Construction of new power generating facilities in northwest Wyoming has been delayed, in part because of air quality concerns in neighboring South Dakota. And faster-than-anticipated development in southwest Wyoming is causing federal land managers to rethink previous assumptions about the effects of development on air quality.

The Greater Yellowstone report's findings come on the heels of an announcement from the Bureau of Land Management, stating that the agency plans to write a supplemental study on air quality issues in southwest Wyoming's Jonah field area. That study will accompany the Jonah Infill Drilling Project's draft environmental impact statement, which could allow an additional 3,100 wells to be drilled over the next half century.

Energy companies in the area have taken significant strides to mitigate air quality impairment through practices such as the elimination of flaring, but the sheer scope of development is the big concern.

The report compiled by state and federal scientists calls for additional monitoring, as well as protection of existing monitoring systems.

The report notes that, in the Jonah field, oxides of nitrogen emissions are approximately 6 to 8 times greater than originally proposed. Development throughout the region has proceeded faster than anyone anticipated, with more rigs operating at one time. And today's equipment is more powerful than what was previously used.

The report comes at a time when resources for air quality monitoring are already stretched thin, and in some cases face elimination because of budget cuts. The Bridger-Teton and Shoshone national forests, the report states, will face a shortfall of \$160,000 for fiscal year 2006 if air quality monitoring is continued.

The Forest Service is required to protect air quality in Class I wilderness areas, and if air quality impairment exceeds certain thresholds, dramatic actions could be required. Increased impairment of air quality also can harm wildlife such as sage grouse and pronghorn, and trigger federal action as a result.

An insufficient monitoring presence is an invitation to lawsuits and a threat to continued energy production, too.

The Greater Yellowstone Clean Air Partnership's recommendations to bolster air quality monitoring in the area should be taken to heart and implemented.

Wyoming's natural gas development is paying big dividends for the state, and it is playing an important role in providing the energy America needs. State and federal managers need to work together to ensure that the development continues in a way that's best for all of us.