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## Groups protest oil, gas leasing

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JACKSON -- In what is likely the start of a series of protests, Trout Unlimited and the National Outdoor Leadership School -- along with some outfitters and guides -- announced Monday they are protesting the oil and gas lease sale of parcels in the Wyoming Range.

The lease sale, set for April 4, is for 11 separate parcels that total nearly 20,000 acres in the Upper Green River drainage.

Energy development could harm fishable mountain streams including North Horse Creek, Dead Cow Creek, Lead Creek, South Cottonwood Creek and South Beaver Creek, all of which are Green River tributaries and home to native Colorado River cutthroats, according to Trout Unlimited.

"This is one of the last strongholds for this fish," Tom Reed of Trout Unlimited said in a statement. "This sale could put drilling rigs within sight of some very sensitive trout streams, and all the development associated with drilling and exploration will certainly have an impact on water quality and the overall health of the fishery."

The parcels up for lease are part of 44,600 acres in the area of the Bridger-Teton National Forest released by the forest for possible lease sales. That number was scaled back from about 175,000 acres after public outcry from residents, Democratic Gov. Dave Freudenthal and U.S. Sen. Craig Thomas, R-Wyo. They said the area had natural resources qualities that should be protected.

Conservation groups and a homeowners' association filed protests in November for one parcel with two sections totaling 1,280 acres in a lease sale in early December. Those challenges have not been resolved, but the parcels were successfully leased at auction. Development is suspended until the protests are resolved. If it is determined the protests are valid, the Bureau of Land Management -- the agency overseeing the lease sales -- will buy the leases back.

Steven Hall, spokesman for the BLM, has said protests are not unusual. In August, 123 lease parcels were protested of the 188 put up for sale. In June, 142 out of 189 were protested, and in April, 83 of 227 were protested.

In addition to concern for fisheries, Trout Unlimited cited the possible presence of Canada lynx, effects on air quality, and a lack of assessment of current and foreseeable impacts are reasons for the latest lease protest.

People with Grey's River Trophies, Hoback Peak Outfitters, Spotted Horse Ranch, National Outdoor Leadership School, Non-Typical Outfitters, Star Valley Outfitters, The Last Resort and Trophy Mountain Outfitters also all signed a protest letter to Bob

Bennett, state director of the BLM, saying oil and gas exploration in the area "would be a blow to their respective businesses and the livelihoods of their families."

"This sale would not only run off the deer, elk and moose, but it would take a bite out of an industry that has been very good for western Wyoming," Gary Amerine of Grey's River Trophies in Daniel said in a release. "It seems like there's a push right now to get at that oil and gas without considering the long-standing, consistent businesses in this area that depend on the Wyoming Range remaining in its present natural condition. This sale would sacrifice a renewable resource that could last forever for resources that will one day run dry. That's not a wise trade."

Energy industry officials have said oil and gas exploration and development can be done in an environmentally sensitive manner.

#### NewsTracker

\* Last we knew: The Bureau of Land Management will auction lease parcels for possible oil and gas development in Wyoming on April 4.

\* The latest: Several groups and outfitters filed a protest of leasing certain parcels in the Wyoming Range.

\* What's next: More protests are expected.

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