

Wyoming Outdoor Council * Defenders of Wildlife *
Greater Yellowstone Coalition *
The Wilderness Society * Wyoming Chapter of the Sierra Club

MEDIA RELEASE

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**Oil and Gas Leasing Threatens
Key Wildlife Corridors in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem**

Pinedale, Wyoming — A coalition of conservation groups (see header) yesterday filed a protest challenging the sale of oil and gas leases in critical wildlife corridors in the basin country of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE). Once sold, industry will hold the rights to build roads, lay pipeline, and drill for oil and gas on public lands that lie in a scientifically identified migration corridor for the mule deer and pronghorn antelope of the Yellowstone Ecosystem.

“The parcels up for sale sit squarely within the longest terrestrial migration corridor in the continental United States,” said Linda Baker, of the Upper Green River Basin Coalition. “The big game seen every summer in Wyoming’s National Parks depend on the habitat in the Upper Green to endure the winter months.”

“The Yellowstone area’s importance to wildlife is unparalleled in the lower-48 states,” added Wyoming Outdoor Council attorney Tom Darin. “It should not be turned into an industrial sacrifice zone.”

The protest challenges the sale of 16 leases encompassing 9,680 acres of public lands, including six leases that sit squarely in a big game migration corridor. (See attached map). All of the leases are located in the Upper Green River Basin on public lands in the BLM’s Pinedale Resource Area near Pinedale, Wyoming.

The protest specifies violations of the National Environmental Policy Act by the Bureau of Land Management. The BLM is moving forward with the sale of oil and gas leases in important migration corridors without taking steps required by law to analyze and avoid the adverse impacts of oil and gas drilling on Yellowstone’s big game. The BLM is rushing to lease these lands despite findings by biologists Hall Sawyer and Fred Lindzey with the Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit that identify the area threatened by development as an important wildlife travel corridor. Perhaps most significantly, the corridor allows big game to travel to low-elevation habitat where the animals, can find food in the winter when high elevations are covered in snow.

“Yellowstone's magnificent wildlife herds need to move freely. The big push for oil development in crucial wildlife areas will harm Yellowstone's wild ecosystem by blocking migration and directly by the loss of habitat due to the construction of well pads, access roads, and pipelines. This administration needs to stop this fast-track energy wreck, and study the long-term affects to mule deer, and pronghorn antelope," said Liz Howell with the Wyoming Chapter of the Sierra Club.

The protest, which has been filed with the State Director for the Wyoming BLM, could set a precedent that would fix a major loophole in current federal oil and gas leasing policies. “The BLM has put off their analysis of the impacts on big-game species until after they sign away lease rights to the public lands,” said Scott Groene of the GYC. “We want to make sure they look before they leap – not after.”