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## **The Jonah Project: The Tale of the Whale**

*Newly Released Jonah Infill DEIS Calls for More Wells and More Pollution,  
Importance Grows for Doing it Right*

PINEDALE, Wyo. – Upper Green residents today said that while there is a place for more drilling in the existing Jonah Field, they are urging the federal government to do the additional work in a responsible manner. The Wyomingites specifically noted that the drilling could be phased over several years to extend the period of economic growth, that air quality degradation already is a significant issue in the Upper Green and must be addressed more thoroughly, and that wildlife habitat is quickly shrinking.

On Friday, Feb. 11, the Pinedale BLM released the long-anticipated Jonah Infill Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The DEIS calls for the addition of 3,100 wells, the reduction of well spacing from 20 acres to a few as five, and the additional disturbance of up to 16,200 acres with roads and pipelines. This proposal means that more than half of the field's 30,500 acres will be bulldozed for natural gas development. The public has until April 11, 2005 to comment. The BLM will be scheduling public meetings during the comment period.

“We are currently seeing significant degradation in visibility in the Upper Green which strongly appears to be connected to oil and gas extraction work. Furthermore, there are certain chemicals being dumped into the air by well completion flaring that may possibly have a negative effect on human health,” says Perry Walker, a retired Air Force major and a trained physicist/nuclear engineer who has been documenting the change in air quality in the Upper Green River Valley from his home in Daniel, Wyo.

“The increase in wells in the Jonah Field called for in this DEIS, coupled with the increase in new wells expected on the Pinedale Anticline and in the South Piney Field, will almost certainly have cumulative negative effects on the clear air we take for granted in this valley, unless significant mitigation measures are taken including quantum leaps in Best Available Control Technology improvement. Industry has to be convinced that such improvements are good for business and necessary for the continued conduct of business.”

In the abstract of the Infill DEIS, the BLM states it expects “significant project-specific and cumulative air quality impacts...to visibility at regional Class I airsheds (e.g. Bridger Wilderness Area).” The BLM plans to do modeling of air quality impacts from its Preferred Alternative during the public comment period and report its findings in the final EIS, *after* the public has had its opportunity to weigh in on the project.

Furthermore, air quality is only one of the concerns voiced by local residents about the race to develop the Upper Green's natural gas. The development proposed for the Jonah Field is among the most intensive natural gas well densities in the nation.

“We know that energy development is important for our local economy but so is wildlife and so is our quality of life,” says fifth generation Pinedale resident, Ralph Faler Jr.

“Development can be done in a way that is responsible and that minimizes the negatives,” Faler continues. “Industry has the money. They are making unprecedented profits here in the Upper Green. Some of those profits can go into doing development right.”

Industry has complained about the cost of compliance with environmental regulations, but public annual reports indicate the cost of doing business properly isn't hurting profits.

Several energy companies extracting natural gas from the Upper Green River Valley have posted very healthy earnings in the last year. For example, Western Gas reported a 68 percent increase in net income during the last quarter of 2004, to a record \$35.1 million. Questar noted a 100 percent increase in net income from \$20.3 million in 2003 to \$42.6 million in the second quarter of 2004. And among big multinationals companies doing business here, BP reported earnings of \$16.2 billion. According to the reports, profits for the top ten oil companies jumped 30 percent in 2004.

“We are not asking for anything that can't or hasn't been done,” says Linda Baker, of the Upper Green River Valley Coalition, a citizen's group advocating balanced energy development for the valley. “We just want to see that the best available technology and management techniques are used to protect this amazing place. The BLM has said its biggest concern is to protect antelope migration routes, air quality and sage grouse habitat, but I don't see those concerns reflected in this plan.”

“Fortunately, it is just a draft plan,” Baker says. “We encourage the BLM to modify it's DEIS by adopting provisions for “doing it right,” included in our *Responsible Energy Development Proposal*.”

The Upper Green River Valley Coalition's *Responsible Energy Development Proposal* was submitted to the BLM in 2004. This proposal calls for the use of the best available management practices to minimize the impacts of oil and gas development. Such measures, the coalition contends, should be considered a “reasonable cost of exploiting the valley's rich energy resource.” They include directional drilling to minimize surface disturbance, the use of pipelines to reduce truck traffic, which contributes to regional haze and jeopardizes wildlife, and restrictions on well flaring.

“I can't believe what is happening here,” says John Fandek, who has lived in the valley for 42 years. “I never thought I would see this kind of change. There's a hell of a lot more value in this valley than simply oil and gas. We are sacrificing everything for dollars. It's damned discouraging. I hope our local land managers take other, priceless things, into consideration too.”

Attachment (1)

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