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For Immediate Release:

October 4, 2005

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Seeing through the Haze *Protecting Wyoming's Air*

Lander, Wyo. - The Pinedale Bureau of Land Management has officially conceded that the oil and gas activity in the Upper Green River Valley recently approved by the agency will significantly affect air quality as far away as Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks. This week, conservation groups and concerned citizens submitted comments calling the agency to task for allowing the degradation to occur and urging the BLM to impose measure to prevent the haze.

“When we step back and try to take a look at the ‘big picture’ that is presented by this information [in the Jonah Infill Air Quality Supplemental Technical Document], it is clear that BLM is preparing to unleash a regional environmental transformation through the oil and gas development it authorizes and even promotes. It plans to transform an area with some of the cleanest air in the world that is home to our most treasured landscapes in the world to an area where haze obscures views for about a third of the year, human health is threatened, and treasured high mountain fishing grounds are acidified,” the comments state.

These comments—submitted by the Wyoming Outdoor Council on behalf of a number of groups and concerned citizens—were made in response to the BLM’s Jonah Infill Drilling Project Air Quality Technical Supplemental Document, which was released in August. Public input on the document will be accepted until October 7.

BLM’s analysis shows Pinedale will experience nearly four months of oil and gas induced haze per year. Some of the nation’s most pristine air—including wilderness areas in the Wind River Mountains and both Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks—will be hazy anywhere from a few days each year to more than a month. Thresholds for protecting human health from ozone and particulate pollution will be at 98 and 99 percent respectively in the Jonah gas field. And lakes and streams in the Wind River

Mountains—lakes and streams that support popular trout fisheries—are threatened by acidification.

Many citizens in the Upper Green River Valley share the growing concern over the air quality around their homes.

“I hiked up to my favorite rock to reflect for a minute on how lucky I am to have found such an extraordinary natural sanctuary in this valley,” says Judy Walker, who owns land overlooking the Wind River, Gros Ventre and Wyoming ranges near Pinedale. “But I saw a brownish haze no different from what clouds over a typical day in Denver. So, have I started breathing toxic air up here, too? In five years, will my property have any views? Will I always feel a sense of loss now instead of peace? I deeply hope these issues will be balanced seriously with short-term economic development before it is too late.”

Conservation groups and concerned citizens have offered a number of viable solutions to these threats, including calling for phased development to control the pace and timing of impacts and a cap on emissions set to ensure pollution standards are not exceeded. Groups are also asking the BLM to require industry use the best available technology to help curb impacts to air quality. Taking these actions could prevent the degradation of air quality in wilderness areas and national parks and the increasing threats to human health from air pollution that BLM’s current course allows.

“The oil and gas industry earned four billion from natural gas in the Upper Green in 2004,” says Upper Green River Valley Coalition coordinator, Linda Baker. “Prices are continuing to go up. Industry cannot use the excuse that it can’t afford to do it right. BLM also has a responsibility to make sure these threats are removed and we want to see them live up to those responsibilities. ”

For detailed comments on the Jonah Infill Drilling Project Air Quality Technical Supplemental Document go to www.wyomingoutdoorcouncil.org.

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