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Upper Green parcels withdrawn from Dec. 5 Lease Sale
Concerns about wildlife impacts lead BLM to pull two parcels

PINEDALE, Wyo. —At the last minute, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has withdrawn two parcels originally offered for sale in its December 5 lease auction after protests from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department raised concerns about impacts to big game migration and sage grouse.

These parcels —as well as others in Pinedale Field Office resource area—were also protested by several conservation groups and some local landowners. The BLM kept the other protested parcels in the sale offering, but “tagged” them with a requirement that if the BLM state director grants the protest, the affected parcels will be pulled and received monies returned to the high bidder.

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department’s protest points out that the existing 1988 Resource Management Plan fails to consider specific and recent big game migration information and ask the BLM to “cooperatively work with the Department to proactively develop a management strategy to maintain important migration corridors in concert with escalating natural gas development throughout the Upper Green River Basin.”

“We are really concerned with the way the wildlife habitat is being fragmented by development here in the Upper Green,” says Peter Aengst of The Wilderness Society. “The BLM is reviewing an infill plan for 5,000 to 8,000 additional wells in critical winter range on the Pinedale Anticline, new wildcat wells are proposed in important summer habitat in the adjacent Wyoming Range, and now these leases are being offered in migration areas. Where are the animals going to go?”

On November 28, the BLM mailed a letter to the groups and individuals who had protested the lease sale informing them that two of the parcels in question—#/WY-0612-160 and WY-0612-161 located northwest of Daniel near Merna—had been withdrawn to “give the BLM time to address new information submitted by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.” These contiguous parcels total 4,240 acres.

A flurry of protests over the past few years reflect the growing concern that the BLM is not addressing wildlife impacts adequately in its leasing decisions. This December Wyoming Game and Fish Department protest follows a protest by Governor Freudenthal

of the BLM's June 2004 lease parcels in the Upper Green because of wildlife concerns, and another Wyoming Game and Fish Department protest of BLM's August 2002 parcels in the Trappers Point area because of migration concerns.

“Once a lease is issued it is very difficult to stop development” says Bruce Pendery from the Wyoming Outdoor Council and the preparer of the conservation groups’ protest. “We are concerned that development in these new areas will jeopardize the health of the Upper Green’s mule deer herds. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department’s decision to protest the sale of these parcels and the BLM’s subsequent decision to withdrawal them validates our concerns.”

Leasing in the Upper Green is currently taking place under the 1988 Pinedale Resource Management Plan. Conservationists argue that new air quality and biological information in the area has rendered the old plan obsolete and thus the BLM needs to stop leasing until it has a new land use plan in place that is based on the most recent research and analysis. The draft for a new resource management plan is expected to be released by the BLM in early 2007, after four years of postponement.

“When it comes to my backyard, what’s most important is clean air, great views, wildlife, and being able to graze cattle. Why are we so quick to destroy what brought us here in the first place?” asks Beaver Creek Ranch manager Margie Braun.

A number of lease sales in the nearby Wyoming Range were temporarily halted this fall after the Interior Board of Land Appeals determined that the arguments put forth in protests—arguments that are very similar to those put forth in protests on the parcels offered yesterday—raised legitimate concerns about the lack of adequate environmental analysis.

“BLM has staff biologists who have all the migration corridors and wildlife crucial habitats mapped, as well as the newest wildlife data available at their fingertips,” says Linda Baker of Pinedale’s Upper Green River Valley Coalition. “Yet these treasured, Wyoming assets are given no consideration by BLM when leases are offered for sale. An oil and gas company says ‘lease’ and BLM says ‘how much?’”

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