

# Governor against Oil & Gas leasing in the Forest

By Noah Brenner & Rob Shaul

Wyoming Governor Dave Freudenthal has come out against continued oil and gas leasing in the Bridger-Teton National Forest.

"I am a clear supporter of oil and gas, but I am not a supporter of oil and gas in the Bridger-Teton," Freudenthal told a friendly audience earlier this month at the Power of Place conference in Jackson.<sup>2</sup>

Governor Freudenthal argued that the recreational values of the Bridger-Teton outweigh any oil or gas below the forest.

As an example, Gov. Freudenthal



Gov. Freudenthal believes recreation is more valuable.

from Roughneck 3/31/05

## Governor, cont.

pointed out that the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), uses the Bridger-Teton extensively for its courses, particularly the Merna area, which the Governor classified as the "most vulnerable chunk" of the Forest.

Governor Freudenthal also argued that the value of the Bridger-Teton extended beyond simple economics.

"I believe over time, its contribution to the state, and not just economically, is such that we don't need to lease it right now," he said in an interview. "We have enough area under lease already that we haven't developed."

Governor Freudenthal qualified his statements by saying that not leasing in the Bridger-Teton Forest now does not mean that the area should never be leased, pointing out that advances in directional drilling might make development less destructive.

"I am nervous to say it should be banned for leasing forever but at the current state of technology, we shouldn't

be leasing it," he said. "Until we have the technology that allows us to develop it without harming the unique qualities of the land, we can wait."

Bridger-Teton Forest Supervisor Kniffy Hamilton, agreed to take the governor's statements into consideration but did not comment on the future of leasing in the Bridger-Teton.

"Minerals leasing on public lands in the West has become a polarized issue in recent years. I think the governors statement about leasing on the Bridger-Teton is a reflection of that," Hamilton said. "I am confident that the Forest Service and the governor's office will continue to work together on this issue as we have in the past."

ExxonMobil's huge Riley Ridge wells are located within the Bridger-Teton Forest southwest of Big Piney. But ExxonMobil spokesman Chris Dobbs would not comment directly on Governor Freudenthal's position against leasing.

"We do support a public policy of multiple use which does include oil and gas as well as other uses," Mr. Dobbs said. ■