

Pinedale Roundup 11/17/05 \*

## ***Demand control over your land***

Well, at least now we know where we stand. The BLM it seems does not care what local people have to say about how public land is managed in Sublette County.

Yes, the agency scheduled three public meetings to discuss the issue. Unfortunately, the format prevented any meaningful "discussion" from taking place.

During a meeting held at the Pinedale Library on October 8 agency and industry officials stood up and told us what they want to do and then broke up what amounted to an angry mob in the back of the room in order to "answer" questions and defer the blame.

It was a successful way to dodge a concerned public that is beginning to wonder why the BLM manages its land to maximize the resources under the ground no matter what happens to the resources above it.

Divide and conquer is a timeworn strategy and it is usually successful.

Then, when Questar comes in to significantly expand their winter drilling proposal, the BLM chose not to let the public comment on, much less even know about the proposal until after it was approved.

It could be argued that adding another rig to the Mesa isn't a big deal but it is a big deal.

Completions are a big deal.

In its original pilot project Questar committed not to complete wells in the winter because of the additional noise and equipment needed to do it- such as 140 extra truck trips.

The affects of completions on big game is also a big deal.

There are 50 percent fewer mule deer wintering on the Mesa. This proposal explicitly states that the increased activity by Questar will further that decline.

I don't blame Questar for asking for such an expansion. They were approached by the federal government to increase gas production and responded with one way to do it. (If I knew I could have anything I wanted I would think big as well.) But I think it is shameful that the BLM pays lip service to its desire for public comment but the agency seeks to stifle it whenever possible.

Next time, BLM officials should just smile, show an arial photo of the Mesa and say "This won't hurt a bit." We won't believe them but it seems that there is nothing we can do about it and they know it.

There is also a growing trend towards making decisions about land use around Pinedale at the state and national level rather than the local level. When I called both the local BLM and the local Game and Fish Office for more information about the decision I was referred to the state offices of both agencies.

It appears to me that these state and national agencies have chosen to micro-manage the land around Pinedale, instead of leaving it to their employees that work and live here. This puts another level of bureaucracy between Pinedale residents and the land use decisions that affect them.

It is time for local residents to start asking why. Why doesn't the BLM want to know what we think? Why don't the BLM and the Game and Fish let these proposals pass through the local offices? It looks to me like an effort to keep the public out of public land decisions. - Noah Brenner