



Is G&F opposition meaningless now?

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The BLM's approval last week of a seventh Questar rig drilling on the Mesa this winter and a handfull of winter completions is striking in its boldness.

The agency never publicly advertised Questar's request for four more rigs and 20 completions. There was no scoping notice, nor a public hearing.

Instead, the BLM conducted the Environmental Analysis inhouse and gave Questar just a portion of what the company had requested.

Even over public opposition from the Wyoming Game & Fish Department.

Hal Sawyer's mule deer study demonstrated a 46 percent loss of wintering mule deer on the Mesa. This figure, of course, has caught the attention of the G&F.

The Department's opposition to the additional Questar rig, and it's expressed opposition to dropping all-winter restrictions which has been requested by the operators, is new.

Until now, winter drilling proposals from industry have received G&F blessing. In fact, even before he submitted a formal winter drilling proposal to the BLM, Questar's Ron Hogan met with and lobbied local G&F officials to receive their blessing.

The G&F endorsed Questar's original winter drilling proposal, and this winter's additional ASU proposal. Based on this pattern, I had assumed G&F blessing was a requirement for any additions to winter activity on the Mesa. The BLM seemed happy to let the G&F be the deciding authority when it came to wildlife impacts on the Mesa.

But Questar's 7th rig this winter proves this assumption wrong. We have a situation now where G&F and BLM biologists are not agreeing on impacts to wildlife. Now it is the BLM which has taken wildlife decision-making authority back from the G&F.

Governor Freudenthal has already indicated he doesn't support limiting drilling to protect air quality. And with this shift in wildlife authority from the G&F to the more industry-friendly BLM, industry should be heartened that wildlife issues may no longer be a serious obstacle to development.