

Here's a partial roundup of energy-related items affecting the southern Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, including the Upper Green River Valley, where many of Jackson Hole's wildlife spend the winter.

Hoback Wells

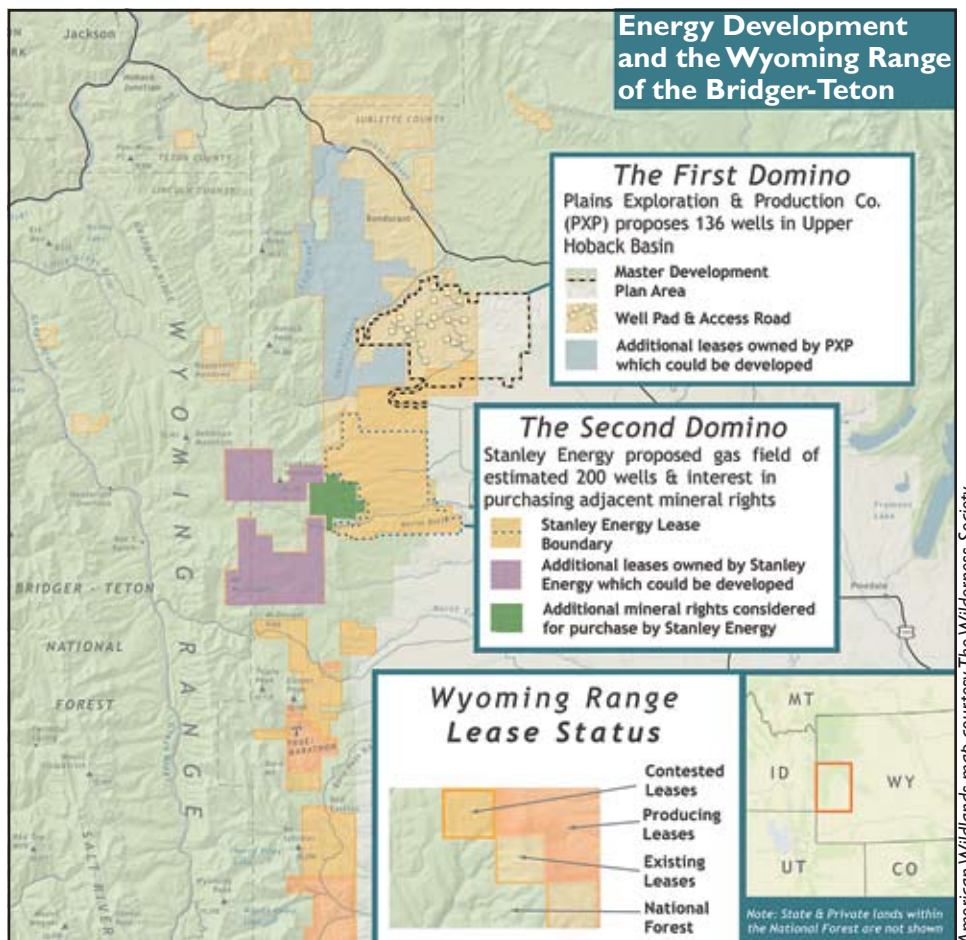
In 2005, Plains Exploration and Production Company (PXP) proposed drilling up to three exploratory natural gas wells on Bridger-Teton National Forest lands located about seven miles southeast of Bondurant. If these wells produced, Plains planned to submit a second proposal for full field development. Bridger-Teton officials released a draft environmental impact statement on this proposal a year ago, which generated about 19,000 public comments. Almost all opposed the project. PXP decided to withdraw that initial proposal and to present plans for full field development instead (see map). Forest officials are now expanding their analysis to address the new proposal, now called the Eagle Prospect and Noble Basin Master Development Plan EIS.

A Master Development Plan is a new tool for the National Forest Service. It includes a number of wells clustered together that share an operational plan, facilities, roads, pipelines and other infrastructure within specific geographic boundaries. Alternatives to be considered in the new EIS will focus on general parameters of development and not on specific locations or orientations for wells and roads. The EIS will look at the whole proposal, but after approval, as development of the field progresses, there will no longer be any additional National Environmental Protection Agency actions. The new proposal is for up to 136 wells drilled from 17 well pads, the construction or reconstruction of 29 miles of roads, and gas lines and facilities within 22 square miles.

The location is currently recognized as a roadless area, as a critical birthing area for mule deer, and as habitat for elk and moose. Although the deadline for scoping comments was Feb. 7, the draft EIS is expected in September and will then be available for further public comment. *Our thanks to the Harder Foundation for help informing people about this issue.*

More Wyo. Range drilling proposed

On Jan. 28, Bridger-Teton officials announced plans for a new environmental analysis of oil and gas leases on 44,720 acres of the Wyoming Range. The leases have been suspended since 2006, when the federal Interior Board of Land Appeals ruled that an earlier National Environmental Policy Act analysis didn't adequately consider impacts to wildlife and the environment. The public has until mid-March to submit scoping comments on the new study to this address: Attn. Stephen Haydon, Forest Minerals Staff, Bridger-



American Wildlands map courtesy The Wilderness Society

Of all the threats facing the forest that surrounds Jackson Hole, none could cause greater harm to wildlife, the environment and our tourism-based economy than energy development. This past fall, U.S. Sen. John Barrasso introduced federal legislation that, if passed, would prohibit future oil and gas leasing on the Wyoming Range of the Bridger-Teton National Forest. Based on work begun by the late U.S. Sen. Craig Thomas, the Wyoming Range Legacy Act of 2007 would also allow buybacks of exploration and development rights already sold to energy companies, which could be an option to avert the proposed PXP and Stanley Energy developments. What's the next step? It's up to Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to schedule a hearing. The bill has been mired in the committee's backlog of land and energy legislation, but Sen. Barrasso says he expects a hearing "in coming weeks." Visit www.wyomingrange.org for more information on efforts to protect the Wyoming Range.

Teton National Forest, P.O. Box 1888, Jackson, WY 83001-1888, or email them to comments-intermtn-bridger-teton@fs.fed.us.

Interestingly, just days after Bridger-Teton's announcement, officials with Stanley Energy of Denver proposed a plan to drill on more than 20,000 of the 44,720 contested acres. The company wants to put about 200 wells on eight 50-acre well pads in an area west of Merna in the Horse Creek and Beaver Creek drainages (see map).

Pinedale BLM Plan

Pinedale Bureau of Land Management officials originally expected to issue a final EIS in December on a draft plan to manage more than

a million acres of public land in the Upper Green River Valley. The BLM's Kellie Roadifer now says it will be released for a short public comment period sometime this spring. BLM staffers are still working on incorporating the comments from some 100,000 letters they received concerning the draft EIS. Wildlife, air and water quality, recreation, hunting and fishing, and the rate and size of energy development are at the heart of citizens' and conservation groups' concerns about the plan. The Upper Green River Valley Coalition's website, www.uppergreen.org, is a good source for information on the BLM plan, as well as other current energy industry plans to greatly expand drilling on the Pinedale Anticline. ■