

Here's an overview 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. Visit www.jhalliance.org to keep posted. (Thanks to the Harder Foundation for supporting our work.)

Protecting the Wyoming Range

This past summer, a bill to protect the Wyoming Range of the Bridger-Teton National Forest was included in the Omnibus Public Land Management Act (S. 3213) and introduced on the U.S. Senate floor. Sen. John Barrasso first introduced the Wyoming Range Legacy Act of 2007 last fall. If passed, the legislation would prohibit future oil and gas leasing on the Wyoming Range. Based on work begun by the late U.S. Sen. Craig Thomas, it would also allow buybacks of exploration and development rights already sold to energy companies, which could be an option to avert the proposed developments discussed below. The full Senate must vote on the Omnibus Act before it passes to the House of Representatives. Please contact Wyoming's congressional delegation to voice your support for this legislation:

U.S. Sen. Mike Enzi

Email via: <http://enzi.senate.gov/public>

U.S. Sen. John Barrasso

Email via: <http://barrasso.senate.gov/public>

U.S. Rep. Barbara Cubin

Email via:

http://www.house.gov/cubin/zip_auth.shtml

Visit www.wyomingrange.org for more details on efforts to protect the Wyoming Range.

Hoback Wells

The draft environmental impact statement on Plains Exploration and Production Company's plan to drill up to 136 natural gas wells near Bondurant at the north end of the Wyoming Range is expected out in November. The Eagle Prospect and Noble Basin Master Development Plan proposes building 17 well pads, 29 miles of roads, and gas lines and facilities on 22 square miles of forest. The location is currently recognized as a roadless area, as a critical birthing area for mule deer, and as habitat for elk and moose.

Plains had originally proposed drilling three exploratory wells in 2005. The EIS for that project generated about 19,000 public comments; almost all opposed it. Last year, the company withdrew that proposal and presented plans for full field development instead.

Keep an eye on www.jhalliance.org for information about how you can comment on the new draft EIS this fall.



Pronghorn winter near a gas well outside Pinedale. Photo by Franz Camenzind

More Wyoming Range threats

Despite admitting that one energy company had an undue influence on the process, Bridger-Teton officials decided this summer to continue a NEPA analysis on 44,700 acres of contested oil and gas leases in the Wyoming Range of the forest west of Merna around Horse and Beaver creeks.

These 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.

Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal blasted forest officials in April for allowing Stanley Energy, one of the aspiring lessees, to participate in meetings between Forest Service personnel and an outside contractor hired on the company's recommendation to write the supplemental environmental impact statement. (Under NEPA, companies that might benefit from an EIS are barred from such discussions.)

Although B-T officials have since terminated their "memorandum of understanding" with Stanley Energy, and to alleviate the public's concerns have published notes from planning meetings that company representatives attended, they are nevertheless proceeding with the draft SEIS, which is expected in September.

Pinedale Resource Management Plan

The final environmental analysis for this Bureau of Land Management plan should be available on Aug. 22 at www.blm.gov/rmp/wy/pinedale/documents.html. The plan will set the course for managing more than a million acres of public land in the Upper Green River Valley southeast of Jackson Hole for the next 10 to 15 years. (The draft EIS was released in February of 2007 and generated more than 100,000 letters, most of which cited concerns about energy development.) After it's posted, the final EIS will be subject to a 30-day review and appeal period. To find out more, visit www.uppergreen.org.

Pinedale Anticline

The Bureau of Land Management has released its revised plan for expanded drilling on the Pinedale Anticline project area southeast of Jackson Hole. The proposal calls for 4,400 more wells, almost nine times the number currently in place, likely drilled at a rate of up to 232 wells per year. This would substantially expand the impacts beyond what was authorized in the original plan in 2000. Also, in a precedent-setting move, the operators propose to drill year-round and no longer be subject to well-established, seasonal drilling protections for big game and sage grouse.

While this proposal contains some good measures to limit industry's footprint, unless enforceable mitigation measures are strengthened, this ramped-up drilling in the Pinedale Anticline will harm northwest Wyoming's quality of life, clean water and air, exceptional vistas and extraordinary wildlife. Please contact the BLM today and let them know that a slower pace of development and stronger enforcements are paramount for finding real balance on the Anticline. Write to: Caleb Hiner, Project Manager, Bureau of Land Management, Pinedale Field Office, P.O. Box 768, Pinedale, WY 82941.

Air quality concerns

The close proximity to Jackson Hole of energy development on the Pinedale Anticline threatens our valley's air quality and migrating wildlife. Five times this past winter alone, Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality officials issued ozone warnings for Sublette County (just southeast of Teton County), reporting that levels of the toxic gas reached a point that could pose a threat to children, the elderly or those with respiratory ailments. They attributed the cause mostly to energy development on the Pinedale Anticline and Jonah fields.

In March and again in July, a group of health professionals, business people and concerned citizens sent letters to BLM State Director Robert Bennett, Gov. Dave Freudenthal, the Centers for Disease Control, EPA Regional Director Robbie Roberts, Wyoming Dept. of Health Director Dr. Brent Sherard, and the CEOs of Shell, Ultra, Encana, Questar and BP Amoco asking for a comprehensive health impact assessment in conjunction with the Pinedale Anticline analysis discussed above.

The Environmental Protection Agency gave the Anticline plan its lowest possible environmental rating, citing public health concerns about elevated ozone levels, documented groundwater contamination, and decreased visibility in the Wind River Range due to air pollution. None of these are adequately addressed in the plan. ■