

Comment Now on Pinedale BLM Plan

By Linda F. Baker

Upper Green River Valley Coalition

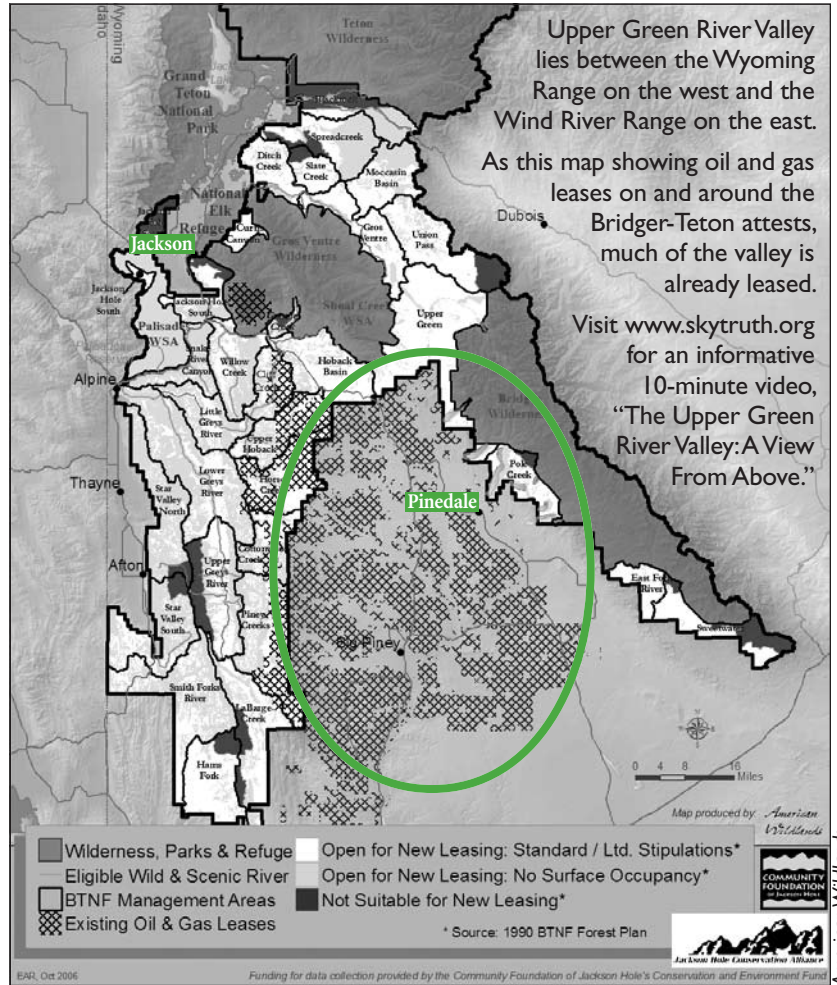
The Pinedale Bureau of Land Management [BLM] has released for public review a draft of the Pinedale Resource Management Plan, which will set the course for managing more than a million acres of public land in the Upper Green River Valley southeast of Jackson Hole for the next 10 to 15 years.

The Upper Green is a high, cold sagebrush-grassland surrounded by four mountain ranges, including the spectacular, jagged peaks of the Wind River Range, and traversed by two major rivers, the New Fork and the Green. This strikingly beautiful basin has for centuries been home to pronghorn antelope, mule deer, elk, moose and the world's largest concentrations of sage grouse. Its surface and groundwaters are as pure as distilled, and it harbors the longest overland migratory pathway – that of the Grand Teton National Park pronghorn antelope herd – in the Western hemisphere outside Alaska. (See related story on Page 16.) It is the keystone connective valley in the southern Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

In an ironic twist of geologic fate, the Upper Green also lies above one of the largest natural gas deposits in the country. Here, multinational corporations vie for drilling rights in the packed Jonah and Pinedale Anticline natural gas fields, and continue to request both additional “infill” projects and unprecedented exemptions from seasonal and surface wildlife protections – requests that have the potential to set a dangerous standard wherever energy development occurs in the Rocky Mountain West.

While most of the valley remains relatively pristine, it's threatened by expanding oil and gas development and its effects, including ground and surface water contamination, severe wildlife declines, scenic impacts and acidic deposition in the Class I air and watersheds of the Bridger, Popo Agie and Fitzpatrick wilderness areas, and Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks.

The draft plan recognizes the crucial role that the Upper Green's winter ranges, migration routes and calving areas play in the health of the region's big game herds, and proposes several new Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. The proposal also recognizes that some of this wildlife habitat is being transformed into an oil and gas landscape, and it acknowl-



Upper Green River Valley lies between the Wyoming Range on the west and the Wind River Range on the east.

As this map showing oil and gas leases on and around the Bridger-Teton attests, much of the valley is already leased.

Visit www.skytruth.org for an informative 10-minute video, “The Upper Green River Valley: A View From Above.”

You have until June 18 to submit comments – a rare opportunity to help guide what happens in this pivotal area where many of Jackson's wildlife spend the winter.

edges that “natural gas development on the Mesa has displaced mule deer to less suitable habitats.” The agency's preferred Alternative 4 divides the resource area into four categories: Intensively Developed Fields; Minimally Developed Areas, No Surface Occupancy [NSO] and Unavailable for Development.

BLM is taking a positive step in identifying areas that should be protected from full-field development, but loopholes, having little to do with wildlife and almost everything to do with the desires of industry, would render these protections meaningless. For example, the BLM would waive NSO protections when directional drilling is too costly, and “minimally developed” areas could be converted to those that are intensively developed.

Alternative 3, on the other hand, would prohibit development on the valley's most sensi-

tive lands, or about half the resource area, providing contiguous swaths of protection for our abundant wildlife. Some areas would still be available for existing energy development. This more appropriate compromise still raises concerns about the questionable form of “outcome-based” management common to all the alternatives.

The public has until June 18 to submit comments, so please take a few moments to read the draft plan, and then write to the BLM about your concerns. For a copy of the plan, go to: www.blm.gov/rmp/wy/pinedale, visit the Pinedale BLM at 432 East Mill St., Pinedale, or call BLM's Kellie Roadifer at (307) 367-5309. Submit comments to: Bureau of Land Management, Pinedale Field Office, Kellie Roadifer, 432 East Mill St., P.O. Box 768, Pinedale, Wyoming 82941, or via email to PRMP_WYMail@blm.gov. ■