

Readout summary: BLM Orphaned/Abandoned Wells Webinar, 1/18/2021

Four panels of community leaders, commercial operators, environmental representatives, and landowners offered suggestions to the Bureau of Land Management in a January 6, 2022, online webinar and listening session that drew more than 1,000 participants.

Interior's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management Steve Feldgus introduced the webinar, noting the "tremendous amount of excitement throughout the Department of the Interior and the entire Biden-Harris administration for the incredible potential this program has to help clean up polluted sites, cut down on methane emissions and water contamination, reduce health impacts to Tribes and overburdened communities, and put people back to work."

The BLM is the lead on a [multi-agency effort](#) to identify and remediate thousands of orphaned wells located on federal lands across the country with \$250 million in funding available from the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law passed in Congress in November 2021](#).

The webinar was divided into four panels, addressing such issues as how BLM and its partner agencies should interact with state programs, the mechanics of plugging orphaned wells and rehabilitating the surrounding landscape, addressing the needs of landscapes and communities impacted by orphaned wells, and how to track the program's progress and successes.

In the first panel discussion, representatives from state Oil and Gas Commissions and oversight groups noted that while thousands of wells are plugged and rehabilitated each year, the need is still growing as more wells become orphaned and more old wells get discovered. Plugging old wells can be time consuming, and the panelists encouraged the BLM to find ways to speed up the evaluation, review, and approval process. They also asked the BLM to be sensitive to "split-estate" issues, or those areas where the owner of the surface is different from the owner of the underground mineral rights.

The second panel discussion covered the technical requirements of plugging wells, and panelists offered counsel and cautionary notes. Panel members noted that there are numerous companies that can do the work, but they will need to hire and train additional personnel. The BLM was encouraged to maximize efficiency by performing well plugging on large groups of wells, particularly when that could be done in conjunction with states and Tribes.

A third panel of experts from conservation organizations noted that many orphaned wells are within close proximity to national parks, monuments, and other sensitive areas. Many are also located near small communities – including Tribal communities – that can be negatively impacted by poor air and water quality, particularly if those communities rely on tourism as an economic base. They encouraged

- **Webinar Recording**
 - [Complete Program](#)
 - [Introduction and Overview](#)
 - [Topic 1: Existing State and Federal Programs](#)
 - [Topic 2: Plugging Wells](#)
 - [Topic 3: Impacts of Orphaned Wells](#)
 - [Topic 4: Closeout, Steps to Prioritize](#)
 - [Webinar Transcript \(PDF\)](#)
- **PowerPoint Presentations**
 - [PowerPoint Format](#) (3MB)
 - [PDF Format](#) (807kB)

the BLM to plan remediation that improves the landscape around well sites and not to simply cap the wells.

Finally, the fourth panel encouraged the BLM to prioritize the workload and track progress over time. They encouraged the BLM to report the results of its actions and share with the public any opportunities for input as the wells are plugged and rehabilitated. The panelists emphasized the need for regular communication for the program to be a success.

A list of panelists is below. The webinar's recordings, transcript and slides have been posted to the BLM's website at <https://www.blm.gov/programs/infrastructure/orphaned-well>.

- BLM -

Webinar order of topics/panelists

Introduction – Steve Feldgus, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Land & Minerals Management

Welcome – Tracy Stone-Manning, Director, Bureau of Land Management

Federal orphaned well program overview – Nada Wolff Culver, Deputy Director, Policy and Programs, BLM

Topic: Interaction with state programs

- Colorado - Dave Andrews, Orphan and Distressed Operator Program Lead, Colorado Oil & Gas Conservation Commission
- Wyoming - Tom Kropatsch, Oil and Gas Supervisor, Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission
- Sara Kendall, Program Director, Western Organization of Resource Councils

Topic: Orphaned wells remediation work

- Larry Bilby, Continental Industries Field Services
- Jeff Leitzell, Executive Vice President, Exploration and Production, EOG Resources
- Jason Walsh, Executive Director, Blue-Green Alliance
- Randy Pacheco, President, A-Plus Well Services

Topic: Effects of addressing orphaned wells on landscapes and communities

- America Fitzpatrick, Senior Program, National Parks Conservation Association
- Dr. Catherine Garoupa-White, Executive Director, Central Valley Air Quality Coalition
- Joan Brown, Executive Director, NM/El Paso Interfaith Power & Light
- Kayley Shoup, Citizens Caring for the Future

Topic: Prioritizing work and tracking progress

- Shannon Anderson, Staff Attorney, Powder River Basin Resource Council
- Adam Peltz, Senior Attorney Environmental Defense Fund
- Don Schreiber, Landowner, Northwest New Mexico