

Previously Issued Oil and Gas Leases in the White River National Forest

August 2015

CURRENT STATUS

The BLM is conducting an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to determine whether 65 leases in the White River National Forest (WRNF) should be voided, reaffirmed, modified with additional or different terms, or subject to additional mitigation measures for site-specific development proposals. Nineteen affected leases are currently producing oil and gas or committed to a unit or agreement. Cooperator review of the initial draft of the planning document ran from Aug. 7 to Aug. 20, 2015. The BLM anticipates releasing the draft EIS for a 45-day public review in November 2015. The final EIS is slated for release in August 2016, followed by a Record of Decision in November 2016.

BACKGROUND

In 2007, the Interior Board of Land Appeals ruled that WRNF leases in Thompson Divide were sold without adequate NEPA analysis because the BLM had not adopted the WRNF's 1993 NEPA analysis or performed its own NEPA analysis. The BLM determined that the original WRNF NEPA analysis is no longer adequate and is conducting a new analysis through this EIS.

Gas drilling and development has been occurring in the WRNF, including the Thompson Divide area, since the 1940s. Substantial conventional gas production exists in the western portion of the forest, while the deeper shale reservoir target in the Thompson Divide area remains untested. The most recent decision making these National Forest lands available for oil and gas leasing was made by the U.S. Forest Service through its 1993 White River National Forest Oil and Gas Leasing EIS. Those decisions were carried forward in the White River Forest Plan in 2002. The Forest Service recently published a Final EIS and Draft Record of Decision looking at future oil and gas leasing within WRNF boundaries, including in the Thompson Divide. The BLM is working to incorporate the analysis from this Forest Service EIS about future leasing in this area as it conducts its EIS.

The Colorado River Valley Field Office is in the process of analyzing alternatives as part of an EIS looking at previously issued oil and gas leases in the WRNF. The EIS will address NEPA deficiencies on 65 existing oil and gas leases in the WRNF issued since 1993, including 25 in the area known as the Thompson Divide. The BLM completed scoping in May 2014 and received more than 32,000 public comments.

The Forest Service and the BLM will not approve any development or conduct an analysis for existing oil and gas development proposals on these leases until the BLM's EIS is completed. This includes development proposals in the Thompson Divide. On April 1, 2014, the BLM extended lease suspensions for two years for 18 leases held by SG Interests and seven held by Ursa Resources Group in the Thompson Divide area because these leases are being analyzed in the EIS. Since then, the BLM has suspended ten other leases per the request of six other companies based on the ongoing EIS. Suspension of leases prevents any development activity and pauses the 10-year deadline leaseholders have to begin developing their leases.

