

2 March 2010

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Via FAX 703-440-1701

RE: Protest for March 18, 2010, West Virginia BLM Competitive Oil & Gas Lease Sale

Specific Protest to Parcel Numbers: **ES-080-03/10 WVES 56279 ACQ** and **ES-081-03/10 WVES 56280 ACQ \*(WVES 55214)**

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept the following protest on behalf of **The Mountain Institute, Appalachia Program**, pursuant to the Bureau of Land Management's (referred to in the remaining document as "BLM") oil and gas lease sale offerings of certain parcels within the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia, scheduled to be offered at the March 18, 2010 BLM Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale. The Mountain Institute (referred to in the remaining document as "TMI") specifically protests the individual parcels identified above for the following reasons, with detailed discussion of these reasons further in the document:

- The proposed parcels of sale are located within and in close proximity to TMI's program operating area near the Spruce Knob Mountain Center. Gas drilling operations would disrupt our educational programming, create a significant hazard on the roads with approaching school buses, and degrade the wilderness character of the high-elevation landscape on Spruce Mountain.
- The Monongahela National Forest Plan has not been updated for horizontal drilling and hydro-fracturing and there are currently no state or federal regulations in place for these practices. TMI feels that opening these areas to drilling would unreasonably risk long-term damage to the forest, headwater streams, and freshwater drinking supplies in favor of immediate resource development.
- The BLM and the U.S. Forest Service consider areas within and surrounding these lease parcels to be of high value to the outdoor recreation industry, which includes hunting, fishing, tourism, local communities, and the state of West Virginia. The BLM should not offer these lease parcels for sale until a full economic and environmental impact analysis is completed that addresses these impacts.

### **Interests of the Protesting Party**

TMI is a global, non-profit organization that is dedicated to promoting mountain cultures and preserving mountain environments. TMI operates in the mountains of three continents: the Himalayas, the Andes, and the Appalachians. Mountains sustain life on earth. In a world facing unprecedented change, The Mountain Institute is committed to protecting its mountains. Through empowering mountain communities and conserving mountain ecosystems, TMI ensures that mountains will continue to provide the essential resources - natural, cultural and inspirational -- needed for mankind's survival on a healthy planet.

In Appalachia, TMI serves primarily as an environmental education organization, providing educational programming to nearly 2000 students a year. The organization employs 3 full-time staff members on Spruce Knob, and up to 20 seasonal (8-month) instructors. It is the mission of TMI's Mountain Learning Programs to help people become powerful, secure, knowledgeable individuals with a clear vision of their responsibilities and potential for improving the human condition and the natural world. The Appalachia Program also supports economic development that is compatible with sustainable use of natural resources. The Mountain Institute is a partner with and permitted commercial user of the Monongahela National Forest, operating many of its programs at the Spruce Knob Mountain Center.

### **Statement of Reasons**

TMI Appalachia's educational programs are based out of the Spruce Knob Mountain Center, located on the Southwest flank of Spruce Knob, bordered on three sides by the Monongahela National Forest. The majority of TMI's educational programming utilizes the public land surrounding the property and is permitted by the Monongahela National Forest. A portion of the lease sale parcels is used consistently during TMI programs and is viewed by thousands of students and adults each year. This area is promoted by TMI as a pristine "wilderness" and the definitive example of a healthy and thriving ecosystem. Marcellus Shale drilling in the vicinity of TMI will severely limit our program area and thousands of people from this region and throughout the United States will be dismayed by the outcome of this sort of practice on our public lands.

The majority of the lease area parcels lies in a sensitive, high elevation ecosystem and possesses the origins of a resource far more valuable than natural gas - clean water. Within the parcels are the headwaters of the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay, as well as the headwaters of the Cheat River, which flows into the Monongahela River and eventually to the Ohio River. The actions taken in these headwater areas will affect the millions of people who rely on these mountains as the source of their fresh water.

The brief history of Marcellus play includes a significant number of careless decisions from the gas industry, resulting in environmental catastrophe. Pennsylvania has already learned, from experience, that the environmental costs of hydro-fracking outweigh the positive, economic impacts. They are dealing with dead streams and unhealthy drinking water. We have few of these experiences in West Virginia at this time.

Parcel **ES-081-03/10 WVES 56280 ACQ \*(WVES 55214)** lies within one of the most heavily used areas in the Monongahela. The natural features of the area provide exceptional fishing, hiking, horseback riding, camping, and rock climbing. The 20+ campsites in the area are occupied weekly March – November by fisherman, hikers, and equestrians. Users travel this road heavily, as it leads to Spruce Knob, Spruce Knob Lake, the Sinks of Gandy, and the Laurel Fork Wilderness Area. The economic, cultural, and ecological value of this parcel should make protecting this high visibility area a high priority for the USFS. Furthermore, the tanker trucks on this one lane, gravel road will make traveling on and camping along Gandy Creek Road a dangerous endeavor. It is the leasing of this parcel that could disrupt TMI program operations.

Parcel **ES-080-03/10 WVES 56279 ACQ**, with Middle Ridge Hollow, Bud Hollow, Teeter Camp Run, Vance Run, and Little Low Place Hollow, is an area of high biological integrity and diversity. The area has been monitored by the WV DEP and is visited regularly by fisherman searching for a high quality wilderness and brook trout fishing experience. The Vance Run and Laurel Fork canyons are deep and remote. The experience this provides to the visitor, fishing a perfect stream that leads to a perfect river in a deep canyon, is not commonplace in the eastern United States.

### **Conclusion**

The Monongahela National Forest is treasured by the citizens of West Virginia and by all of its visitors. To jeopardize our public land trust in favor of immediate resource development would most certainly devalue the treasure and generate strong opposition from user groups such as The Mountain Institute and its constituents, as well as from the general public.

Please continue to manage our public lands with the best interest of the forest, water, and people in mind and do not lease the rights for drilling until the knowledge of its effects on rivers, streams, and groundwater catch up with the drilling technology. The mistakes made and damage caused in other states will be repeated in West Virginia until proper water treatment technology and enforceable regulations are in place. Until then, The Mountain Institute will oppose Marcellus Shale drilling in the Monongahela National Forest.

Sincerely,



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