

March 6, 2007

BLM Pinedale Field Office  
Matt Anderson, Project Manager  
PO Box 768  
Pinedale, WY 82914

As residents of Sweetwater County and frequent visitors to Sublette County, we are very concerned about the scope and pace of natural gas development on BLM-administered lands in our area. These changes have been accelerated by an unbalanced pro-development policy promulgated by politicians in Washington D.C. and their colleagues in the oil and gas industry. As citizens, taxpayers, hunters, and recreational users, we seek a return to a more reasonable pace and scope of development.

Specifically, industry seems to have gotten everything it asked for in the Jonah Infill projects. Thousands of new wells have been approved and will be permitted. In the Pinedale Anticline, industry is seeking another massive expansion without sufficient safeguards to protect the wildlife habitat, air quality, and impacted communities.

While some development is very desirable, it becomes a question of scale. 4,400 more wells in the Anticline will have deleterious effects on big game numbers. We have already seen a significant decline in mule deer wintering numbers. Equally important, the proposed development will have significant negative impacts on air quality. Air quality is impacted not just by the exhaust from generators, service vehicles, and burn-offs from the fracturing process, but also from the dust created from hundreds of miles of new roads. The BLM must ensure that emissions and dust do not exceed federal limits, and, moreover, the state DEQ needs to do a better job of monitoring and control.

While a "concentrated development area" is an idea we can support, too often we have seen these development areas expanded, and, in some cases "infilled" without proper mitigation and monitoring. Winter drilling prohibitions made a good deal of sense to lessen the impacts on wildlife. We are dismayed that the BLM has relaxed winter drilling restrictions in many areas. The Pinedale Anticline ought to have its winter drilling restrictions in place and enforced.

We have seen major impacts on gateway communities such as Rock Springs and Pinedale. Vastly increased drilling activities will continue to exacerbate these problems. Too often the taxpayers of the communities are asked to "pick up the tab" from these impacts, while the operators do not live up to their end of the social contract.

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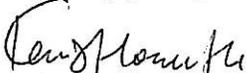
We have been enjoying the Wind River Mountains for nearly thirty years. The unprecedented pace and scale of development in the Jonah Field, the Mesa and the Pinedale Anticline will continue to have negative impacts on air and water quality of this range of mountains. The Bureau of Land Management is supposed to represent the interests of the citizenry, not simply the desires of the oil and gas industry. Too often during the last six years, the BLM has sided with the operators at the clear expense of the public. We are very concerned with the legacy we are leaving our children.

We would prefer to leave our children a legacy of clean air, clean water and long-distance views. Instead, they are going to inherit an industrial park at the base of some of the world's most magnificent mountains. It's time to slow down the pace of development in Sublette County, truly monitor and mitigate its impacts, and not simply allow industry to dictate the terms of development on public land.

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Very truly yours,

  
Kevin Holdsworth

Jennifer Sorensen

  
32 W. 2<sup>nd</sup> N.  
Green River, WY 82935  
(307) 875-8817

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