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Bridger-Teton National Forest releases final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
and Record of Decision on Wyoming Range Oil and Gas Leases

JACKSON, WY. Bridger-Teton National Forest Jacque Buchanan has decided not to authorize the Bureau of Land Management to lease National Forest land in the Wyoming Range for oil and gas development, based on the analysis contained in the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS.)

The decision for the 44,720 acres of National Forest land factored in deficiencies identified in previous environmental analyses, new information on issues such as protection of threatened animals, impacts on local air quality, other energy projects underway in the area, and public comments. The Forest Service decision announced today supersedes previous decisions that authorized the Bureau of Land Management to offer leases on these 35 parcels.

After considering all the alternatives and the environmental impacts associated with each, I have determined this is the best course of action," said Bridger-Teton Forest Supervisor Jacque Buchanan. "No single factor led me to this decision. Rather, it was the combination of the sensitivity and values of the area, the magnitude of other activities currently underway or planned with potentially cumulative impacts, and the concerns of citizens, organizations and other agencies."

The supplemental environmental impact statement looked at whether there was significant new information or changed circumstances which would indicate a different decision should be made since the prior decisions by the Forest Service to authorize leasing.

Four alternatives were analyzed:

- Alternative 1: "No Action" would authorize no leasing.
- Alternative 2: "Proposed Action" would authorize 12 suspended leases and 23 pending leases.
- Alternative 3: "Proposed Action Plus" would authorize the 12 suspended leases and 23 pending

leases subject to additional stipulations ? such as no surface occupancy and controlled surface use - in response to current issues.

- Alternative 4: ?Minimal Leasing? would allow directional drilling from producing leases to enable some recovery of energy resources.

A variation on Alternatives 2 and 3 that authorizes the 12 but not the 23 lease parcels was also analyzed.

Decision Subject to Appeal

Individuals or organizations who submitted comments or otherwise expressed interest in the project during the comment period may appeal the decision. Appeals must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer within 45 days of the publication of a legal notice in the Casper Star Tribune, Casper and should be sent to the Regional Forester care of Appeal Deciding Officer, Intermountain Region USFS, 324 25th Street, Ogden, UT 84401; or by fax to 801-625-5277; or by email to appeals-intermtn-regional-office@fs.fed.us.

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Background

The original leasing availability decision was made in the Bridger-Teton Forest Plan in 1990, which identified land with the National Forest where oil and gas leasing could be considered. More recently, in 2004 the Forest Service decided to authorize leasing of the 44,720 acres within the Bridger-Teton National Forest, a move that allowed the Bureau of Land Management to offer these lease parcels for oil and gas exploration and development. Leases were offered in several sales in 2005 and 2006. Those decisions were appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, which found appellants were likely to succeed on the merits of their challenges of inadequate environmental analysis. After the Board's finding, BLM requested a remand to allow additional analysis focused on Canada lynx and air quality. Upon the remand, BLM suspended 12 issued leases and classified as ?pending? action on 23 parcels where lease were sold but not issued. Upon the remand, BLM suspended 12 issued leases and classified as ?pending? action on 23 parcels where leases were sold but not issued.

Public scoping conducted in February 2008 and a review of new information by the Forest Service identified several key issues warranting the supplemental analysis. These include designation of critical habitat for Canada lynx, potential cumulative effects of rapid and continually expanding energy development in the Upper Green River Basin, proposed designation of nonattainment areas for air quality standards, visibility impairment of Class I airsheds, decline in mule deer populations and increased recreation use. These issues and others form the basis for the environmental analysis put forth in this Final Supplemental EIS upon which the Forest Supervisor's decision is based.