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Re: Comments on the Plains Exploratory Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Greg,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Plains Exploratory Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

The proponent of this DEIS has sold the project to the public as a wildcatting expedition - the drilling of a mere three wells from a single pad in the woods in the off-chance hope of finding a little bit of gas. In stark contrast to this seemingly benign scenario, the Chief Executive Officer for Plains, Jim Flores, revealed a much different picture when he said, "We're hoping to get a thicker, much more commercial play, so we can develop a nice field right in the middle of the forest." Plains bolstered Mr. Flores' public remarks with filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) which jaw-droppingly equated the potential of this "nice field right in the middle of the forest" with the Jonah Field.

Irrespective of the documented scope of the DEIS, it is clear that the supposed "wildcat" must be viewed as setting the start of significant additional development within the proposed Project Area. To view it any other way betrays the reality of a situation where a publicly traded company would endure overwhelming public opposition, draft a full-blown EIS (on only a portion of their planned development) and spend a significant amount of money to drill three wildcat wells after having filed SEC statements that suggest that this project is functionally a "Jonah in the trees." Beyond the significant impacts that might follow from the full-field development of Plains' proposed Project Area, my greater fear is that history will view this project as the first domino that fell towards the industrialization of over 150,000 acres of oil and gas leases within the Wyoming Range. I will actively oppose any development scheme that will result in such an outcome.

In order to be fair to Plains and the other Wyoming Range leaseholders, I have frequently and publicly expressed my opposition to full-scale oil and gas development, including any additional leasing, within the Wyoming Range of the Bridger Teton National Forest. Given the expanse of the

Wyoming Range, there should be room for discussions about a strategy for protection of important areas.

Admittedly, opposition by a Governor to federal action can be dismissed because I cannot change federal law or budgets. However, Wyoming's Senior Senator has also expressed his opposition to extensive development of the Wyoming Range. Hopefully, this voiced opposition will eventually take the form of federal legislative proposals to protect portions of the Wyoming Range. Perhaps the USFS should delay consideration of this proposal.

Beyond these generally stated concerns, I would offer the following specific comments:

Wildlife

The Wyoming Game and Fish Department has informed me of their concerns with this DEIS and has expressed its disappointment that few of the agency's previous comments on the proposal have been incorporated into this DEIS.

I am especially concerned with the potential impact to moose crucial winter range. While the operators have a requirement to reduce drilling time to protect wildlife resources that same requirement should also apply to construction of the access road, well pad and maintenance. There should be no surface disturbing activities in big game crucial winter range.

Additionally, it is my understanding that wildlife information used in this DEIS is outdated and is taken from the 1990 Forest Plan. If this is the case, it is unfortunate that the Forest Service is using such outdated data. There have likely been significant changes in wildlife and habitat trends over the last 17 years, especially when the nearby oil and gas activities on BLM land is taken into account.

Long-term Development

As mentioned above, it is clear that this is not a typical wildcat well as it has been set forth in the DEIS. Because this is clearly not a standard wildcat-type scenario, it should not be analyzed as one. Instead the Forest Service should conduct a regional analysis of oil and gas development, including air and water quality, wildlife habitat, soil degradation and other impacts.

Water

The DEIS has the potential to allow the disruption of domestic water wells and other surface water uses within and adjacent to the Project Area - most notably in the already water-impaired Hoback Ranches area. Unfortunately, the DEIS makes no reference and provides little to no analysis of the hydrology of the area and any potential impacts that the proposed development might have on that hydrology.

Range of Alternatives

For a project of this nature in an area as sensitive as the Wyoming Range, the range of alternatives that were analyzed in detail was extremely paltry. Several suggested alternatives - including helicopter-only access to the proposed site and more surface-sensitive drill sites - were abruptly and, inappropriately rejected, leaving a narrow and incomplete range of alternatives from which the ultimate decision-maker is left to choose.

Public Comment

It is clear that many people in Wyoming are not in favor of this development. It is unfortunate that the Forest Service was not more accommodating to public concerns when it decided to turn down numerous requests, including one from my office, for an extension of the comment period on this DEIS. This is particularly troubling as a number of the Hoback Ranches residents, those that stand to be most impacted by this project, live in the area only during the summer and could not attend the public meetings to discuss and fully understand the DEIS.

Socio-economics

The socio-economic impacts of the proposed development are wholly inadequate given the recreational and other values to adjacent communities. Such a critique makes no mention of the burden the project would have on shared infrastructure (roads, etc.) in the area.

As a closing note, I observe the irony of your scheduled completion of this environmental review just in time to allow PXP to cut the access road during hunting season.

Best regards,
Dave Freudenthal
Governor