

# CITIZENS PROTECTING THE WYOMING RANGE

## Proposed Drilling in the Upper Hoback *What's at stake for Wyoming's namesake mountains*

The Hoback River pours out of the Wyoming Range near Bondurant, Wyo., into a valley treasured for its beauty and outdoor recreation. For generations, people have come to hunt, fish, boat, hike and ride horses. Now the energy industry is coming in search of natural gas. A drilling proposal under consideration by the Bridger-Teton National Forest could pave the way to industrial development in the northern Wyoming Range, degrading the character of these scenic public lands forever.

A successful strike here could usher in an onslaught of industrial activity, similar to what is already under way on Bureau of Land Management gas fields in the nearby Upper Green River Valley. The Forest Service is finalizing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Hoback



An aerial view of the Hoback project area. The Wind River Range is in the background. Photo by EcoFlight.

project, known as the "Eagle Prospect." This fact sheet explains what is at stake and what you can do ensure drill rigs stay out of the northern Wyoming Range. Federal legislation will soon be introduced that would withdraw undeveloped parts of the range from future leasing. Such a law would be crucial for protecting these mountains and retiring some of the 150,000 acres of leases blanketing the range.

### **The Proposal**

Plains Exploration and Production Co. is seeking approval to drill up to three exploratory wells to test the natural the gas potential in a 23,260-acre project area. The operators would reach the site from Merna, requiring the construction or upgrading of 11 miles of road, which would be plowed in the winter. The wells would be drilled from a single 6.5-acre pad in

a roadless area. Each well would take about 60 days to drill. The project also entails the construction of pipelines and other facilities needed for testing and operating the wells. Operators would "flare" the test wells, a dirty practice that is being phased out on Upper Green fields because it discharges plumes of smoke and roaring noises.

*"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 CEO **Jim Flores**

### **What's at Stake?**

The wells would be drilled in the upper Hoback's Noble Basin seven miles southeast of Bondurant. The project area encompasses key summer range and calving areas for big game, including the famed Sublette mule deer herd. Pronghorn, moose and elk also pass through on their seasonal migrations, and the area covers habitat considered crucial for the recovery of Canada lynx, a threatened species.

Plains' stated aim in the Hoback is to replicate the success the energy industry enjoys in the Upper Green. If its exploratory wells prove productive, the company and other leaseholders can be expected to seek permission to develop their leases across the project area. These lands include the controversial "South Rim Unit," which underlies part of the Hoback Ranches subdivision. Since productive wells have a potential lifespan of 30 years, these wildcat wells could "open the door" for industrializing the north end of the Wyoming Range.

### **Is the draft EIS rubber-stamping industry plans?**

In its initial feedback on the draft EIS, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department noted a number of flaws and omissions. Perhaps the worst is the Forest Service's failure to consider the larger impacts of what the exploratory wells seek to enable: full-field development. Game and Fish also noted that the Forest Service's "preferred alternative" is virtually identical to industry's proposal—differing only in the location of the temporary gas pipeline.

It appears the Forest Service has not studied a truly complete range of alternatives. Game and Fish biologists, for example, had

asked the Forest Service to consider an alternative drilling location in a less-sensitive area, but no such analysis was undertaken. Nor did the Forest Service study helicopter access or locating the drill site outside the roadless area. Numerous groups had requested these measures as an alternative to introducing more roads into this sensitive part of the forest.

*"Considering the increased road access into remote habitat and potential for full field development, long-term effect of gas exploration could result in very significant regional effects on important wildlife species."*

**--Wyoming Department of Game and Fish**

### **The Solution**

**Citizens Protecting the Wyoming Range**, a Daniel-based group of outfitters, ranchers, sportsmen, conservationists and property owners, seeks to keep new development out of Wyoming's namesake mountains. Drilling here would not constitute the "greatest good for the greatest number." Rather, it would displace the traditional multiple uses that are now a key driver of western Wyoming's recreation-based economy. Western Wyoming is doing its share to provide energy to the nation, with vast amounts of gas being extracted from the Jonah and Pinedale Anticline gas fields to the east of the Wyoming Range. Drilling in the Wyoming Range will not add much to the nation's gas reserves, but it will forever change our beloved mountain range and undermine future economic opportunities.

*"We shouldn't be drilling national forests. They're there for special reasons and I don't think we should diminish those reasons. Even if you do it well, you're changing the character of these lands."*

**--Wyoming's Senator Craig Thomas**

The ultimate solution requires federal legislation to enable buy-out and retirement of the Bridger-Teton's undeveloped energy leases, a concept that has drawn support from the state's top elected leaders. The late U.S. Senator Craig Thomas planned to introduce such

legislation when he passed away on June 4.

**What you can do:** Please write Governor Dave Freudenthal and Wyoming's delegation in support of Senator Thomas' legislative effort. Find writing tips and addresses at our website, [www.wyomingrange.org](http://www.wyomingrange.org).

### **Or contact us:**

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