

Hoback Rim no place for wells

The Bridger-Teton National Forest and Plains Exploration and Production Co. haven't gotten the message: Wyoming folk don't want the forest around Hoback Rim turned into a gas field. That sentiment has been expressed by thousands since the Texas-based energy company proposed drilling three wells near the Hoback Ranches subdivision a few years ago. Coupled with the Forest Service's attempt to lease 40,000 acres nearby for more development, the exploration programs spurred a coalition of residents and visitors to protest. Plains Exploration agreed, as critics charged, that the three wells it proposed would just be the camel's nose under the tent. It withdrew its request and is now seeking permission to develop up to 136 wells on land that is valued for recreation, wildlife and scenery. The plan would see the upgrading or construction of 29 miles of road, the creation of 17 well pads and the denuding of 400 acres of forest. The impact to the 20,000 acres where Plains Exploration owns leases won't be known until the Forest Service releases maps.

Transformation of Wyoming's Green River valley landscape from sagebrush steppe to industrial oil field at the Jonah Field and other areas near Pindale occurred so quickly it shocked residents to action. In a state once known for its allegiance to the minerals industry, residents have reversed course. U.S. Sen. Craig Thomas sought, before he died in office this year, to protect the Wyoming Range from the missteps at Jonah. His successor, John Barrasso, drafted legislation that would put the Wyoming and Salt River ranges off limits to oil and gas leasing and allow the buyout of many existing mineral rights there. Gov. Dave Freudenthal is part of the chorus and sees Plains Exploration's plan as the first domino in the destruction of the area's natural values.

The Bush-Cheney administration has used its power to clear the way for oil and gas exploration and development, often with purposeful disregard for environmental values. The administration has eliminated the balance congress intended be weighed in development decisions. Now legal cases and appeals — a recent Idaho ruling on sage grouse and an appeal of leasing 40,000 acres in the Wyoming Range being two examples — are catching up as courts and federal panels expose abuses of authority. There's no indication Plains Exploration's plan would be considered under different rules. It should be stopped. The main reason is painfully obvious: A gas field is inappropriate in the headwaters of the Snake River.

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Dog daze

I'm surprised that everyone is on the pogy's side in the "Bobby case." Granted, you expect an employee of the police department to be able to actually kill a domestic animal that shot, or to make a more heroic attempt to do it to the pound, but why isn't there more empathy for the traumatized neighbors who viciously attacked and injured by an animal was apparently allowed to run loose? I can tell you how many times some beloved Wyoming dog, unrestrained, on national forest trails, on a park, has come at me, snarling and bristling on the back of its neck, while its helpless owner cries fondly: "He won't hurt you." I think it's time dog owners became more realistic about their dangerous pets' personalities and stopped viewing them as precious extensions of themselves. If you can't keep your unfriendly dog under control, get a cat.

Vicki L.

Beauty or beast

I am sincerely saddened and disappointed by the letters written to the News & Guide last week regarding the "inappropriate" photos of a