

## **New drilling project threatens the Wyoming Range**

*136 gas wells proposed in the Bridger-Teton NF: A bad idea only gets worse*

**The proposal:** Plains Exploration and Production Company (“Plains”), a Houston-based company with no experience drilling on national forest land, is seeking permission to drill 136 wells from 17 well pads and construct or upgrade 29 miles of roads.

**Where:** The Hoback Basin is in the northern reaches of the Wyoming Range, 7 miles south of Bondurant. The project would occur entirely on the Bridger-Teton NF in one of its largest roadless areas. This remote refuge provides crucial habitat for sensitive species like lynx, and summer range, birthing areas and migration corridors for big game animals.

**Timeline:** Development could begin as early as spring of 2009. Scoping comments are due Feb. 7, 2008.

**What happened to the first proposal?** In 2006 Plains proposed a 3-well/1 pad “exploratory” project and the draft EIS released in spring 2007 analyzed impacts from only these 3 wells. This small-scale proposal raised doubts when Plains’ CEO bragged about his intention to develop a whole field in the forest, not just a few wells. Public outcry spurred Plains to step back and withdraw that EIS, but now the company has come clean with its major drilling plans. This new EIS will examine Plains’ much expanded proposal.

**Who opposes Plains’ proposal?** Even with Plains’ original and much smaller proposal there was tremendous opposition. More than 19,000 citizens wrote to the Forest Service opposing the project and Governor Freudenthal, the Wyoming Tourism Board, the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce, the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission, the Wyoming Outfitters and Guides Association, and others all expressed serious concerns. This larger project should generate even more opposition.

*What you can do:*

**Submit comments** to the Forest Service by February 7, 2008 via email at [comments-intermtn-bridger-teton@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-intermtn-bridger-teton@fs.fed.us) or in writing to Greg Clark, District Ranger, Big Piney Ranger District, Box 218, Big Piney, WY 83113.

**Attend January open houses** in Pinedale, Bondurant, or Jackson to learn more about the project. See [www.wyomingrange.org](http://www.wyomingrange.org) for dates/times (not set yet).

**Write a letter to the editor** of the Casper Star or your local paper.

*Suggested points to raise in your scoping comments:*

Responsible and balanced energy production means some places, like the Wyoming Range, are too special to drill. Let the Forest Service know they have other options besides opening the doors to industrializing Wyoming’s namesake mountain range:

**What’s the rush? The Forest Service should slow down.**

Before moving forward to authorize this project the Forest Service should ensure all baseline data and information is updated and comprehensive. It should prepare a forest-wide analysis to determine current oil and gas suitability and allow time for other agencies to conduct updated studies on wildlife, air, and water resources.

**Plains should negotiate a buy-out of their leases.**

In the twelve years since Plains purchased these leases, Sublette County has changed dramatically. Massive oil and gas development has brought changes to our public lands, wildlife herds, air quality and small town way of life. Legislation to protect the Wyoming Range is working its way through Congress right now in response to citizens' desires to safeguard the Wyoming Range from new oil and gas development. The Forest Service should fully develop an alternative that looks at a buy-out/trade-out of Plains' leases.

*Specific risks to mention:*

**Clean air:** Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and our national forests are already experiencing decreased visibility from the extensive oil and gas drilling in the Jonah and Pinedale Anticline fields. Drilling 136 new wells just 20 miles south of Jackson Hole threatens to compound the problem.

**Recreation:** Each national forest has a niche in the larger forest system. In 2006, during the forest planning process, the Bridger-Teton identified its niche as a wild, backcountry forest with high quality wildlife habitat and countless opportunities for recreation. Transforming a backcountry area of the Bridger-Teton into an industrial gas field contradicts the forest's own vision for its future.

**Wildlife:** A year ago the Wyoming Game and Fish Department raised numerous concerns about the impacts to wildlife from road building and infrastructure—and that was when the project proposed just 3 wells. Now, with 136 wells proposed, it is doubtful the impacts to big game herds, fisheries and sensitive species like lynx can be mitigated.

**Water:** There has never been a comprehensive study of the groundwater and surface waters in the Hoback Basin. Oil and gas development is highly water intensive and the agencies must have accurate and up to date baseline data before plans are approved that could diminish needed water to ranchers, homeowners and wildlife.

**Tourism:** Seven million visitors come to Wyoming each year to see the mountains, wildlife, lakes and rivers of our state. Safeguarding the Bridger-Teton from industrial development means protecting a diverse and sustainable Wyoming economy.

**Hunting and Fishing:** Twenty-nine miles of new or upgraded roads will increase sediment in streams, putting the native trout for which the Wyoming Range is famous, at risk. Roads and well pads decrease habitat and interfere with migration corridors, making it difficult for big game animals to move freely and securely. Loss of fish and big game means poorer hunting and fishing for sportsmen and women.

**Impacts to small communities:** For the homeowners along Horse Creek in Merna, the Hoback Ranches property owners and others in Bondurant, this project will disrupt their rural way of life. Industrial impacts like heavy truck traffic and/or helicopter overflights would be unwanted intrusions.

For more information, please visit [www.wyomingrange.org](http://www.wyomingrange.org).