

# Oil and Gas in the Rocky Mountain West

The Rocky Mountain region, already home to more than 110,000 permitted wells, today faces additional, accelerated oil and gas development. Some of the major new projects are described below.

**1 - Rocky Mountain Front** (Montana) – In 2004, plans to allow several new exploratory wells were terminated but active leases remain and the Bush Administration may soon re-activate suspended leases. The result of drilling would be landscape scars and the spoiling of the quiet, unique character of this special place, known for its world class scenery, recreation and wildlife populations.

**2 - Powder River Basin** (Montana) – Current plans call for between 10,000 and 26,000 coalbed methane (CBM) wells to be drilled over the next 20 years. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and State predict 9,000 miles of new roads, up to 4.7 million acres of impacted wildlife habitat, and a 600-foot aquifer draw down across the Basin. The majority of development will occur on private land, often over the strenuous objections of surface owners, in an area where virtually all residents rely on groundwater for domestic and stock use.

**3 - Custer National Forest** (Montana) – The Ashland District in south-central Montana is the last island of undeveloped land in the valley and is home to native prairie dogs, sage grouse, and over 75 other species of concern including the leopard frog. The area is also important to the local economies of south central and southeast MT, as it provides critical habitat for wildlife, highly valued grazing for area ranches, and a destination for thousands of locals and tourists for its natural beauty. The area is a class one airshed, and the Tongue River, which is a tributary to the Yellowstone River and a healthy prairie river system supporting a diverse population of fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and ungulates. The Forest Service is expected to initiate a new land use planning effort for a portion of the Forest in 2005 and energy companies are pushing to drill new coal bed methane wells in the area.

**4 - Beartooth Front** (Wyoming) – The Eastern Front of the Beartooth Mountains is an important buffer zone for Yellowstone Park and the Absaroka-Beartooth wilderness area. It's home to grizzly and black bear, moose, bighorn sheep, wolves, bobcats, golden eagles, and many other animals. The only designated Wild and Scenic River in Wyoming – the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone – runs through the general project area. Signs of Native American habitation are seen through out the area and the Nez Perce National Historic Trail, as identified by the BLM, is located inside the project area. Seventy five square miles of the Beartooth Front is in the process of permitting by Federal, State and County authorities for seismic, gas pipeline, gas infrastructure plant and well drilling activities. A seismic survey will drill 3,240 shot holes 30 feet deep, filled with 10 pound charges every 220 feet along 139.5 linear miles within the proposed area. The BLM is currently updating the Resource Management Plan that affects this area.

**5 - Powder River Basin** (Wyoming) – 88,000 square mile landscape of mixed-grass prairie and sagebrush and red shale cliffs—supports large working ranches and valuable habitat for deer, elk, and Wyoming's largest herd of pronghorn antelope. Over 15,000 CBM wells have been developed and 35,000 new wells are expected within the next ten years. An average of 15,000 gallons of ground water *per well per day* is being pumped and discharged into dry stream beds or reservoirs—causing the draw down of aquifers, soil erosion, stream sedimentation, vegetation damage, and water quality degradation.

**6 - Upper Green River Valley** (Wyoming) – The Valley provides winter habitat for over 100,000 mule deer, pronghorn, and other big game in the southern Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Today this area is under assault by thousands of wells drilled and 10,000 more anticipated in BLM's management plan revision. In addition, the Forest Service wants to lease over 175,000 acres of the Bridger Teton National Forest, south of Jackson Hole. This rugged Wyoming mountain range contains large roadless areas that provide world class hunting, fishing, and other recreational opportunities. If safeguards are not put in place soon, the Valley will be fully industrialized resulting in the loss of critical wildlife habitat and migration corridors.

**7 - Greater Red Desert** (Wyoming) – This area includes the Jack Morrow Hills, the majority of the Great Divide Basin, and Adobe Town, the largest potential BLM Wilderness Area in the state. It is one of the finest high desert ecosystems in the na-

tion and a stronghold for wildlife such as the sage grouse, pronghorn antelope, pygmy rabbit, and ferruginous hawk. As the site of the next big coalbed methane boom in Wyoming, 8,800 wells are projected for the eastern half of the desert under current plans.

**8 - Utah National Forests** (Utah) – Utah's National Forests offer both outstanding recreational opportunities and important habitat for animals like elk, northern goshawk, black bear, cougar, Canada lynx and Bonneville cutthroat trout. The Forest Service has allowed BLM to lease over 135,000 acres of roadless areas with no public notice and involvement and in violation of the forest's new plan.

**9 - Book Cliffs-Uintah Basin** (Utah) – At more than a half a million acres, the 5,000 feet deep Desolation Canyon in Book Cliffs is the largest block of federal wild land in the Lower 48 states not designated as a park or wilderness. Because of its vast size and remote location, Books Canyon hosts a number of sensitive species that benefit from a large area in which to roam and are now threatened by numerous oil and gas leases (that are predicted to only supply 10 hours of oil at current US consumption), some which are located on lands adjacent to the boundary of near-by Dinosaur National Monument.

**10 - America's Redrock Wilderness** (Utah) – The lands proposed for protection in America's Redrock Wilderness Act (ARWA) are a richly varied ensemble of slickrock, canyon country, deserts and mountains. Since November 2003, the BLM has leased over 108,000 acres of lands proposed for protection in ARWA.

**11 - Roan Plateau** (Colorado) – The Roan Plateau is one of Colorado's most biologically diverse areas, a popular backcountry recreation area, and a citizen-proposed Wilderness Area. Industry is seeking to open the top of the Plateau to drilling. Conservationists, outfitters, and Garfield County and its six towns all want to safeguard the special wildlife, recreation, and wilderness values.

**12 - Western Slope** (Colorado) – Scenic landscapes, prized hunting and camping areas and world-renowned ski resorts are all found in Colorado's western slope region. The Uncompahgre Plateau is among Colorado's most ruggedly scenic landscapes, Grand Mesa has become a mainstay for Western Colorado's tourism-recreation economy with unparalleled fishing, equestrian and winter sports recreation, while the 2.3 million acre White River National Forest is known as the birthplace of wilderness and dozens of communities depend on its snow runoff for drinking water. 96,000 acres of the area has already been leased with 600 production wells planned. Impacts could include massive habitat fragmentation and pollution of this region's vital irrigation and drinking water supplies.

**13 - HD Mountains** (Colorado) –The HD Mountains host the last best stands of old-growth Ponderosa pine in southwestern Colorado, with some trees 500 years old. The area also contains over 100 archeological sites more than 1,000 years old. Industry plans to drill 150 coalbed methane wells, and bulldoze over 60 miles of roads, through the largest low-elevation Roadless Area (40,000 acres) in the San Juan Mountains. Another 147 wells are planned for adjacent federal lands.

**14 - San Juan Basin** (Colorado, New Mexico) – The BLM has approved 9,942 new wells on federal lands in the New Mexico portion of the San Juan Basin. This will disturb 36,000 acres of land, affect 1,896 cultural resource sites, and emit an additional 62,000 tons of nitrogen oxides every year into the region's already polluted air. In all, 14,000 new wells are proposed for the Basin.

**15 - Valle Vidal** (New Mexico) – A 100,000 acre unit of the Carson National Forest that's home to New Mexico's largest elk herd and lush forests, meadows, and streams. The Forest contributes millions of recreation dollars a year to nearby communities. The Forest Service has initiated an 18-month process that will determine if the Valle Vidal will be made available for Coal Bed Methane leasing. The Boy Scouts, the former head of the NM Oil and Gas Association, and over 200 town councils, businesses, and organizations have spoken out to protect the area.

**16 - Otero Mesa** (New Mexico) – Covering 1.2 million acres of Chihuahuan Desert grassland, the Mesa is considered one of the most biologically rich and diverse desert eco-regions in the world and contains a large freshwater aquifer. The BLM recently issued a decision to open 95% of Otero Mesa to oil and gas leasing, which is being challenged by New Mexico's Governor Bill Richardson and a strong coalition of ranchers, hunters, and conservationists.