

WESTERN SLOPE CONSERVATION CENTER

December 2018 Lease Sale - General Comment Topics

- Oil and gas development is incompatible with a healthy future for the spectacular North Fork Valley of western Colorado.
- The BLM is proposing the sale of leases in lands surrounding the largest reservoir in the valley, as well as lands contiguous to Colorado Roadless areas and directly above the bucolic town of Paonia.
- The North Fork Valley is too wild, too beautiful, and too productive to be sacrificed for oil and gas interests.
- The communities of the North Fork Valley are strongly opposed to oil and gas development, largely due to the negligible economic gains and the significant irreparable damage that could occur from oil and gas activities in the watershed.

Clean Water

The North Fork Valley is a hub of organic agriculture, and is one of only two federally recognized wine regions in Colorado. Protection of the valley's water supply relies on protecting the North Fork from source to use and preventing pollution from entering this critical water system. For farmers and the agricultural economy, water quantity and quality are both of utmost importance. Organic agriculture, specialty crops, and high-quality hay all depend on abundant water free from contamination.

Surface contamination and spills, which occur regularly in Colorado oil and gas fields, could spread rapidly through the irrigation systems that water the valley. Oil and gas development is known to contaminate water supplies, both above and below ground, and to harm water bodies, rivers and source areas. That is a risk too great for operators in the valley, home to Colorado's highest concentration of organic farms, an agritourism haven, and major headwaters to the Colorado River system.

Paonia Reservoir

Included in the December Lease Sale are parcels immediately surrounding the Paonia Reservoir. Surface spills would immediately and irreparably harm the farms and people of the North Fork Valley, who daily use water from Paonia Reservoir for irrigation needs. Additionally, one of the largest landslides in recorded history is located just upstream from parcels nominated for lease. Oil and gas development in this area could pose serious risk not only to water quality, but to the geologic integrity of the Paonia Reservoir itself and surrounding slopes.

Wildlife

Of particular conservation concern are impacts to mule deer, elk, Canada lynx, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, bald eagle, and greenback cutthroat trout. Coupled with the impacts of existing energy development, additional leasing and development directly threatens rare mid-elevation habitat and its wildlife. The state currently does not possess adequate data on elk and mule deer populations in the area of the proposed development, and local CPW staff indicate that recent elk population numbers in the area have been in steep decline over the last few years. The local elk and mule deer are essential to the local economy, not to mention the ecology of our landscapes.

Traffic Impacts

Increased oil and gas activity will create traffic impacts to the roadways, access routes, nearby residents, and wildlife. A single well can require thousands of truck trips on federal, state, and county roadways that were not designed for that size and frequency. Colorado Highway 133 already poses significant risk for travelers due to the treacherous climate, geology, and isolated location.

See reverse side for more....

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Community Opposition

In 2011 and 2012, the Bureau of Land Management proposed leasing areas of the North Fork Valley for oil and gas development. The community joined together to oppose the lease sale, and proposed a locally grown vision for the North Fork Valley that keeps energy development away from sensitive areas. The BLM is considering the North Fork Citizens' Alternative in the agency's land use plan revision, but the draft plan did not propose to adopt the community vision.

Ongoing Planning Processes

The BLM and Forest Service need to complete ongoing updates to their land use plans to protect the landscape's resources from destructive oil and gas drilling, including adopting the North Fork Citizens' Alternative. Until long-term plans are in place that reflect the community's vision for their future and the extraordinary values of the roadless forest areas, the BLM must not issue new oil and gas leases and must prohibit companies from exploiting loopholes to keep leases on the books that should have expired.

COMMENT ON SPECIFIC TOPICS

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Passionate about these subjects? Review the EA and comment on how development will impact these resources.

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