

North Fork Valley

December 2018 Oil and Gas Lease Sale

Fact Sheet

On July 2, 2018 the Bureau of Land Management announced an oil and gas lease sale for the State of Colorado and the North Fork Valley.

Background

In the August 2012 and February 2013 oil and gas lease sales,, the BLM offered a 30,000-acre and 20,000-acre lease sale, respectively, in the North Fork Valley. The BLM deferred those lease sales until the revised Resource Management Plan for the Uncompahgre Field is complete, in recognition of the fact that the current RMP is stale and does not provide for adequate protections or considerations. In 2016, the BLM released its draft Resource Management Plan, which included no-leasing, no surface-occupancy, controlled surface occupancy and other stipulations. The final Environmental Impact Statement on the RMP is scheduled to come out in Fall 2018, with a Record of Decision in Spring 2019. The BLM's State Office and Uncompahgre Field Office had a policy of deferring oil and gas leasing until the revised RMP is completed. Then the Trump Administration announced new guidance in early 2018, which eliminated routine leasing deferrals and the discretion of state offices by strongly recommending that the State Office consult with the Washington office before deferring any lease parcels. In addition this new guidance made it clear that BLM policy was no longer to wait for completion of a revised RMP.

The Lease Sale in the North Fork Valley

- 8 parcels totaling 7903 acres around Paonia Reservoir, in the Muddy Creek and Hubbard Creek Watersheds, and over Bowie#2 coal mine
 - 1206.89 acres around Paonia Reservoir (15% of the sale acreage)
 - 5072.49 acres over Bowie #2 mine (64% of the sale acreage)
 - 1623.66 acres in the Muddy Creek and Hubbard Creek watersheds (21% of the sale acreage)
- 81% of lease sale acreage in Delta County; 19% in Gunnison County

Issues:

- ❖ **Leasing is the most important stage in the oil and gas development process! A federal oil and gas lease conveys an *absolute right to develop*. Once the lands are leased, the lessee/operator has a guaranteed right to drill and produce those minerals.**
- ❖ **Parcels 8140, 8135, 8138:** Muddy Creek and Hubbard Creek Watersheds, which feed some of the North Fork Valley's most important irrigation and drinking water sources such as the Fire Mountain Canal, are at risk.
- ❖ **Parcels 8320, 8351:** These parcels surrounding the Paonia Reservoir are in one of the most geologically unstable regions in the State, which witnessed the largest mudslide in the country, and Hwy 133 has regular problems with rockfalls.
 - There are already injection wells in the area that may be correlated with recent earthquakes near Carbondale (2.8 magnitude on January 19th, 2017 28 km S of Carbondale; 1.6 magnitude on January 19th 26 km S of Carbondale) and Paonia (3.5 magnitude on July 23, 2016 7 km NE of Paonia). The parcels around Paonia Reservoir are dangerously close to the dam. Canadian researchers have found that fracking results in induced seismicity and recommend a 3-mile buffer around sensitive

infrastructure such as dams and reservoirs. These parcels are within that recommended buffer.

- ❖ **Parcels 8389, 8390, 8391:** These parcels are over Bowie #2 coal mine. BLM has not analyzed the geological implications, or safety implications of the intersection of coal mines and oil and gas drilling.
- ❖ **North Fork Valley farms are the organic breadbasket of Colorado.** North Fork farms stand as a safety net against currently at risk or contaminated farms in Colorado. Four of the top agricultural producing counties in the State also four of the top natural gas producing counties in the state. Delta County is the 5th largest agricultural producing county with 1250 farms.
- ❖ **Rural gas gathering pipelines are exempt from county, state, and federal oversight,** and the BLM should impose a moratorium on oil and gas leasing and development until the safety of rural gas gathering pipelines can be independently monitored and inspected.
- ❖ **The RMP is scheduled to be completed in Spring 2019** and currently has no-leasing, and other important stipulations that conflict with and would otherwise limit or reject these proposed lease parcels.

This proposed lease sale is irresponsible, unnecessary, and dangerous.

This is a complex proposal with significant implications, which merits careful and rigorous review of its cumulative impacts including headwaters, fish and wildlife, recreation, local economy, geological stability, road repair and safety, air quality, seismic activity, and public health. Governor Hickenlooper addressed many of these concerns in his comment letter where he asked for the deferral of the NFV parcels until the RMP is complete.

The Scoping period ended on July 17, 2018, and the next step is to comment on the Draft Environmental Assessment.

- ❖ The BLM is anticipating the release of the Draft EA and an unsigned Finding of No Significant Impact on August 27th, and will hold a 15-day comment period from August 27th – September 11th.

Comments on the Draft EA should:

- ❖ Oppose this lease sale and demand the withdrawal of the North Fork parcels from the December 2018 Lease Sale.
- ❖ Demand deferral of the North Fork Valley lease parcels until the revised RMP is complete.,
- ❖ Address the adequacy of the Agency's analysis. In particular whether the issues you raised in your scoping comment were addressed.,
- ❖ Remind the BLM that 42,000 no-leasing comments were submitted on the RMP because, a no-leasing alternative is the only way to guarantee that this irreplaceable corner of Colorado is not irreparably harmed.

You can send your comments to:

Acting State Director Greg Shoop: gshoop@blm.gov

Southwest Colorado District Manager Stephanie Connolly: sconnolly@blm.gov

Uncompahgre Field Manager Greg Larson: glarson@blm.gov



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