

**WESTERN RESOURCE ADVOCATES ♦ COLORADO ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION
WESTERN COLORADO CONGRESS ♦ NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL
NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION ♦ THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY ♦ OIL & GAS
ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT/EARTHWORKS ♦ COLORADO MOUNTAIN CLUB ♦ CENTER
FOR NATIVE ECOSYSTEMS ♦ WESTERN ORGANIZATION OF RESOURCE COUNCILS
GRAND CANYON TRUST ♦ GLEN CANYON INSTITUTE ♦ ASPEN SKIING COMPANY
COLORADO WILD ♦ WILDERNESS WORKSHOP ♦ CALIFORNIANS FOR WESTERN
WILDERNESS BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION ALLIANCE ♦ SIERRA CLUB ♦ ECOFLIGHT**

For immediate release: March 20, 2008

Contact:

Elise Jones, Colorado Environmental Coalition, 303-405-6704

Charles Kerr, Western Colorado Congress, 970-245-9377

Mike Chiropolos, Western Resource Advocates, 303-444-1188 x217

Conservation community pans oil shale plan *Government's proposal could irreparably harm Colorado & the West*

DENVER, Colo. - Today a broad array of conservation groups condemned a Bush Administration plan to open up a vast swath of the western United States for industrial oil shale and tar sands development at the expense of all other uses, including recreation, wildlife habitat, agriculture and water for cities and towns.

The proposal from the Bureau of Land Management would make about 2 million acres of public land available for commercial oil shale development, and about 430,000 acres available for commercial tar sands development.

“The technologies necessary to develop oil shale don’t yet exist - despite the billions of dollars expended by the oil industry,” said Elise Jones, director of the Colorado Environmental Coalition. “Yet the BLM is prepared to give its blessing to what amounts to a gargantuan industrial experiment with Colorado’s water, wildlife and communities.”

Based on the government’s own assumptions, a 1 million barrel per day oil shale industry envisioned by the Department of Energy could require 10 new coal-fired power plants and consume more water each year than all of metro Denver. Federal planners also acknowledge the broad and deep impacts likely to be inflicted on Western landscapes for generations – from the displacement of hunting, fishing and agriculture to the conversion of rural water rights to industrial use.

Despite acknowledging the enormous potential impacts of these still-experimental technologies, the BLM claimed that a decision to amend 12 federal land use plans to establish a commercial leasing program would have no significant environmental consequences.

“The impacts to our communities, our water, our air and our wildlife are potentially devastating,” said Charlie Kerr of Western Colorado Congress. “Pursuing leasing without first understanding the impacts of this technology is irrational and irresponsible given western Colorado’s last failed experiment with oil shale.”

On May 2, 1982, Exxon pulled out of its Colony oil-shale project near Rifle, putting 2,100 people out of work and precipitating an economic calamity whose ripples were felt for more than a decade. The date is known as Black Sunday.

In their comments, the coalition of 23 groups argued that the study provided insufficient data to support the BLM's proposal and failed to meet the fundamental requirements of both the National Environmental Policy Act and the Federal Land Policy Management Act. Only after the full development of federal research projects, followed by thorough analysis of all the impacts of leasing and connected activities, can the public be assured that the BLM has enough information for an EIS, they said

The groups also noted that the BLM neglected to assess the cumulative impact of an oil shale leasing program of this magnitude occurring alongside unprecedented levels of natural gas development.

Conservation groups are not the only ones with grave concerns. Similar cautions have been voiced in comments from Colorado Governor Bill Ritter's administration, Front Range water providers, energy experts and local governments.

In their comments, Ritter administration officials urged BLM to adopt the "no-action" alternative, which would allow federal research efforts to move forward before the government commits to creating a large-scale industrial program. Because even basic research has yet to be completed, they argued that the BLM plan to develop an oil shale leasing program now was premature.

In April 2007, energy analyst James Bartis of the Rand Corporation urged Congress to wait for research projects to bear fruit before pushing ahead with a leasing program. "The government lacks important information about the costs and risks of development," Bartis testified. Proceeding without this information, he said, "calls into question the analytic basis of the current, legislatively imposed schedule for establishing regulations for commercial leasing."

The government's estimates about an oil shale industry's thirst for limited West Slope water have alarmed an alliance of the biggest Front Range water providers, including the Denver Water Board, the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, Colorado Springs Utilities and the City of Aurora. The Front Range water utilities said the stockpile of conditional water rights for oil shale development dating from the 1950s and 1960s could affect existing Front Range water supplies as well as potential future efforts to serve Colorado's growing population. The utilities serve about half of the state's estimated 4.3 million residents.

BLM's proposal is a non-starter," said Mike Chiropolos, Lands Program Director at Western Resource Advocates. "In 2005, some in Congress might have thought industry was on the verge of finalizing commercial technologies. But we're just as far away in 2008 as we were in 2005. BLM should stop wasting taxpayer money and come back when they have something worth discussing."

Copies of the coalition's comments are available upon request.