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## Colorado needs more time to comment on oil shale study *West Slope governments, Front Range water utilities among those asking for extension*

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. – More than 20 West Slope governments, Front Range water providers and statewide conservation groups have asked the Bureau of Land Management for more time to comment on an oil shale proposal that would radically transform western Colorado.

The BLM's oil shale and tar sands programmatic environmental impact statement examined three alternatives for promoting oil shale and tar sands development on federal land. Federal officials selected the option that maximized energy production on about 2 million acres in western Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming and minimized protections for the region's water, wildlife and communities.

As envisioned by the government, oil shale development would displace wildlife as well as livestock grazing, hunting, fishing and virtually every other human use in the production zone. Production facilities would use up to 15 percent of western Colorado's water, create numerous new sources of toxic wastes and require the construction of major new coal-fired power plants that would belch enormous amounts of air pollutants, including the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide.

“After more than 20 years of research, oil shale technology is still experimental,” said Joe Neuhof of the Colorado Environmental Coalition. “Even the companies leading oil shale development say it will be years before they decide whether it's even economically feasible. It's difficult to understand how providing additional time to comment on this complex proposal could be a hardship for the government.”

Requests for an extension were sent to the BLM by the Pitkin and Eagle county commissions, the cities of Grand Junction, Rifle, Silt and Carbondale. They've asked for at least 45 more days to review the 1,400-page study and provide additional comment on the likely impact of the massive federal proposal. The comment period ends Thursday March 20.

Western Colorado officials expressed alarm that the study failed to account for the cumulative impact of commercial oil shale production on top of the natural gas boom, which officials project will add tens of thousands of new gas wells to already record levels of development. They noted the study low-balled the likely impacts of oil shale development.

Concerns about an oil shale industry's thirst for limited West Slope water prompted 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, to ask for an additional 60 days. The Front Range water utilities said the stockpile of conditional water rights for oil shale development dating from the 1950s and 1960s could curtail existing transmountain water diversions as well as potential future efforts to serve Colorado's growing population. The utilities requesting the extension already serve about half of the state's estimated 4.3 million residents.

In addition, 15 conservation groups asked for more time to comment on the study, including Western Colorado Congress, Colorado Environmental Coalition, The Wilderness Society, Natural Resources Defense Council and Wilderness Workshop.

They cited the testimony from James Bartis of the non-partisan RAND Institute to the House Natural Resources Committee last April, who noted that the fact that industry is years away from establishing commercial viability and environmental performance calls into question the analytic basis of the current, legislatively imposed schedule for establishing regulations for commercial leasing.

"The current framework established by [the Energy Policy Act of 2005] to rush forward with commercial leasing is clearly not a measured approach," Bartis said.

"The agency's haste to meet a short-sighted Congressional timetable has resulted in a PEIS that is opaque and confusing," said Peter Hart of Wilderness Workshop. "Our community is working hard to provide substantive and constructive comments on the document, but because of these flaws and the significance of this action to the future of western Colorado, we need more time to comment."

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