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**Oil Shale Could Overshadow Air Quality Gains
Congress Considers Slowing Down Commercial Leasing Timeline**

The enormous amounts of electricity required to power a new oil shale boom in western Colorado and Utah would likely come mostly from coal-fired power plants that would create enough pollution to roll back years of air quality gains and inject massive amounts of global warming greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, a coalition of conservationists said today.

A one million barrel-per-day industry, the low end of the range envisioned by federal officials, would require close to three times the amount of electricity produced in all of Colorado in 2005. The pollution from the estimated 12,000 megawatts of needed new capacity would darken the skies, add mercury to water supplies, create new sources of acid rain and snow, and threaten the health of local residents who suffer from impaired respiratory systems.

“The new power plants needed for oil shale production would exact public health consequences that would seriously undermine any benefit from oil shale projects,” said Dr. Brian Moench, President of Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment. “The volume of pollutants like sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and mercury added to the regional atmosphere will certainly result in many premature deaths, respiratory illnesses, non-fatal strokes, heart attacks and childhood neurotoxicity. It would be far better for the public health if we invested in clean, renewable energy sources instead.”

Legislation pending before the House of Representatives would do away with current deadlines that require the Bureau of Land Management to rush into setting up a leasing program before critical questions about oil shale’s viability and its impact on the environment are properly addressed. In addition, U.S. Rep. Mark Udall, D-CO, is expected to introduce an amendment that will prohibit the BLM from completing its commercial oil shale leasing program, or issuing any commercial oil shale leases until the BLM’s oil shale research and development process determines the feasibility and likely impacts of a commercial industry

“The BLM is rushing to lease large areas of the West for oil shale before the first shovels of dirt have been turned during the research phase,” said (INSERT YOUR GROUP HERE). “It’s critical that Congress steps in and tells the BLM to slow down so the true potential and full impacts of oil shale development can be properly assessed.”

The recent decision by industry leader Shell to withdraw its application for a research permit on federal land because of difficulties with its groundwater protection technology is more evidence that the BLM's rush to lock in an oil shale leasing program is premature.

Potential air pollution impacts of a 1,000,000 barrel-per-day oil shale industry could include:

- The release of more than 105,000,000 tons of carbon dioxide, or a roughly 80 percent increase in the amount of CO₂ emitted by all existing electric utility generating units in 2005 in Colorado, Wyoming and Utah combined.
- Sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide emissions could increase by over 35,000 tons per year each. To put this in perspective, that's 20 percent more sulfur dioxide and 16 percent more nitrogen dioxide than was emitted by all of the electrical generating units in Colorado, Utah and Wyoming in 2002.
- Such emissions, if concentrated in the Piceance Basin, could have a significant impact on visibility and nitrogen deposition at nearby pristine and protected areas such as the Flat Tops and Mt. Zirkel Wilderness Areas. It could also have impacts on ozone concentrations in a region already seeing enhanced ozone burdens from the ongoing natural gas boom.

The estimates above are best-case scenarios, based on meeting the power needs for oil shale production with 75 percent coal and 25 percent natural gas, the current utility mix in Colorado. If volatility in the natural gas markets keeps prices high, simple economics would push a more coal-intensive capacity expansion.

The potential imposition of a carbon tax on power plant emissions also adds a layer of financial risk to the threats to western Colorado's water and air resources posed by a commercial oil shale industry. In 1991, Colorado-UTE declared bankruptcy under the financial burden of a capacity expansion designed to provide power to the 1980s oils shale boom, which never materialized.

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