

For Immediate Release

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Proposed Wyoming Gas Field Spells Trouble for Sage Grouse, Pronghorn Migration

LARAMIE, Wyo. – BLM today released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Normally Pressured Lance (NPL) project, entailing 3,500 new oil and gas wells sited within known winter concentration areas for sage grouse as well as the world-famous “Path of the Pronghorn” migration corridor. Conservationists immediately raised concerns that the project could spell doom for an already-stressed sage grouse population in the Upper Green River Valley, have severe impacts on migration corridors, and add ozone pollution that could only exacerbate current violations of clean air standards.

The BLM’s preferred alternative permits one to four super-sized (18-acre) wellpads per square mile, connected by a system of high-impact gravel roads that will support the usual heavy truck traffic and human activity to the wellsites, averaging 1,234 truck trips per day.

“About two-thirds of this project area sits atop identified winter concentration areas for sage grouse,” said Erik Molvar of Western Watersheds Project. “The Pinedale Anticline and Jonah Fields have already wreaked major destruction on sensitive breeding and nesting habitats for sage grouse, and while directional drilling and piping of condensate will result in modest reductions in impacts, this is still a heavy industrial project that forces the birds to contend with industrialization on their winter concentration areas as well. Sage grouse populations could crash as a result, just like the mule deer population did.”

Air quality standards are already being violated in Pinedale due to an ozone smog that settles over the valley during winter temperature inversions.

“The Upper Green River Valley has been classified as a non-attainment area under the Clean Air Act since 2012, and drilling another 3,500 natural gas wells will only make things worse,” said Linda Baker of the Upper Green River Alliance. “Skiers like me now check ozone levels before venturing out to enjoy a winter day, but there are times when I have trouble catching my breath. Last winter ozone levels far exceeded healthy levels, and recreationists, asthma sufferers and children were advised to stay indoors.”

The new drilling project may further block or even sever the Path of the Pronghorn migration corridor, with standard densities of wellfield development planned across the migration corridor. The Path of the Pronghorn marks the second-longest land mammal migration remaining in the Western Hemisphere. Pronghorn follow this migration pathway from summer ranges as far north as Grand Teton National Park all the way south to crucial winter ranges near Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge. A [2014 study](#) showed that pronghorn using this migration route avoided oil and gas fields in the Jonah and Pinedale Anticline, skirting westward through the currently undeveloped habitats where the Normally Pressurized Lance project has been proposed.

“The Path of the Pronghorn has already been shifted west by the heavy industrial footprint of the Jonah Field, so it is imperative that the current migration corridor be given a wide berth if any roads and wells are sited in the Normally Pressured Lance project area,” said Molvar.

“Nearly \$10 million dollars went into overpasses and underpasses for pronghorn and mule deer at the Trapper’s Point migration bottleneck,” Baker added. “Federal and state agencies and conservation organizations have invested tens of thousands in wildlife-friendly fencing and interpretive sites. Community support has been amazing, yet most of the conservation attention on the Path of the Pronghorn has focused on Trapper’s Point and lands further north. But if we don’t protect the southern half of the migration corridor and the crucial winter ranges, the migration is doomed and all the past efforts will have been for naught.”

Furthermore, the cumulative development of NPL, paired with the Jonah Field and oil and gas leasing along the Wind River Front and west of the NPL project area could create a migration barrier spanning the entire valley (see accompanying map). In addition to the Path of the Pronghorn, the Red Desert to Hoback mule deer migration corridor presently traverses these contested lands.

“If all of the current oil and gas leases and projects that are currently on the books get drilled out, we could be looking at a wall of gas wells blocking the entire valley,” Baker explained. “If we don’t keep these migration pathways clear of industrial development, we’ll lose these spectacular migrations for good.”

The proposed project is open for a 45-day public comment period that runs through August 21st.

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