

Amigos Bravos ♦ Aspen Wilderness Workshop ♦ Biodiversity Conservation Alliance ♦ Californians for Western Wilderness ♦ Coalition for the Valle Vidal ♦ Colorado Environmental Coalition ♦ Earthjustice ♦ Environment Colorado ♦ Forest Guardians ♦ Idaho Wildlife Federation ♦ National Wildlife Federation ♦ Natural Resources Defense Council ♦ Nevada Wildlife Federation ♦ New Mexico Wildlife Federation ♦ New Mexico Wilderness Alliance ♦ Northern Plains Resource Council ♦ Oil and Gas Accountability Project ♦ Powder River Basin Resource Council ♦ Sagebrush Sea Campaign ♦ San Juan Citizens Alliance ♦ Sierra Club ♦ Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance ♦ The Wilderness Society ♦ Western Colorado Congress ♦ Upper Green River Valley Coalition ♦ Western Organization of Resource Councils ♦ Western Resource Advocates ♦ Wyoming Outdoor Council

2007 WESTERN ENERGY AGENDA

The American West is blessed with enough clean, renewable energy potential to meet a substantial portion of our nation's energy demand. But as the Rocky Mountain states look to the future, a dramatic increase in drilling for oil and natural gas is placing unprecedented pressures on water, ranches, wildlife, landscapes and communities across the Rocky Mountain West. The inclusion of Western energy issues in the recently announced House Natural Resources Committee oversight agenda is an important first step toward responsible energy development in the region. We also encourage Congress to aggressively pursue a clean energy agenda, an outline of which is available at www.saveourenvironment.org/2007_Energy_Platform.pdf.

In order to ensure that our national energy policies achieve the appropriate balance between oil and gas development and economically viable western communities, Congress should take the following steps:

Protect the West's Water

The West's water is the region's most important natural resource and should be protected from the contamination and degradation that is frequently caused by irresponsible oil and gas drilling.

- Repeal Section 323 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (EPAAct), which exempts oil and gas construction activities from the Clean Water Act's stormwater permit requirement.
- Repeal Section 322 of EPAAct, which exempts hydraulic fracturing from the Safe Drinking Water Act. Hydraulic fracturing involves the high-pressure injection of water, sand, and toxic fluids into a rock or coal formation to enhance oil and gas production.
- Allocate funds for the National Academy of Sciences study on the effect of coalbed methane production on water resources as required by Section 1811(d) of EPAAct. Funds should be allocated from the BLM oil and gas program in the FY 2008 Department of Interior Appropriations bill.

Safeguard The West's Special Places

The vast majority of public lands under lease across the West – approximately 24 million acres of 36 million acres under lease – have not been put into production, yet the BLM continues to fast-track leases on millions of acres of public lands each year and is moving forward with creating transmission corridors that could harm our environment.

- Support protection of New Mexico's Otero Mesa, Colorado's Roan Plateau, Wyoming's Red Desert, and Utah's Redrock Wilderness from oil and gas development.
- Revise Section 368 of EPAAct, regarding energy transmission corridors, to avoid sensitive lands, eliminate the application of categorical exclusions, and limit the width of designated corridors.

Conserve America's Wildlife Heritage

The American West has many of the world's last remaining big game herds, with hundreds of thousands of elk, mule deer and pronghorn following ancient migration corridors to calving and fawning areas and critical winter habitat they need to survive, as well as critical habitat for declining species such as sage grouse.

- Require BLM to use Best Management Practices. Every company authorized to operate on federal lands should use practices that will avoid and minimize habitat fragmentation and degradation, such as directional drilling, well clustering, maximizing spacing between wells and well clusters, phased development, unitization and complete concurrent restoration.

Defend Western Ranches and Private Lands

Ranchers and other landowners who don't own the mineral rights beneath their property have little say over whether and how the federal minerals under their lands are developed, and little recourse from the impacts this development can have on their health, drinking water, livelihoods and quality of life.

- Support legislation like Congressman Udall's HR 2064 Western Waters and Farm Lands Protection Act that requires surface use agreements, adequate notification of surface owners, adequate bonding, regulation of water impacts, the clean up of orphaned, abandoned and idled wells, and stronger reclamation standards.

Restore Public Participation and Balance

The BLM's highest priority over the past six years has been to issue as many oil and gas leases in as short a time as possible.

- Amend Section 366 of EPAct to eliminate the 30-day permit deadline. Pressuring the BLM to take quick action on permits hampers its ability to thoroughly review permits and protect other resources.
- Repeal Section 390 of the EPAct to eliminate new categorical exclusions from NEPA review. Requiring BLM to consider the impacts of additional oil and gas development on public lands and to permit public review and comment will lead to more careful decision-making.
- Support the Bush Administration's proposal to eliminate dedicated funding for the Permit Coordination Pilot Project established in Section 365 of EPAct and repeal of the cost recovery fee prohibition. BLM field offices have issued permits at a breakneck pace, often ignoring their commitment to other environmental resources and the public.
- Fully fund BLM's Inspection and Enforcement Program and ensure that inspectors' time is spent on inspection and enforcement activities, not permitting of other activities.

Look Before We Leap on Oil Shale

The Energy Policy Act put the BLM on a path to seek commercial leasing for oil shale as early as 2008 – despite the fact that there still is no economically viable extraction technology and the long list of environmental and social impacts cannot be fully understood by then.

- Prohibit commercial lease sales, promulgation of regulations, and environmental analysis for commercial leasing until current Research Development and Demonstration projects have proven they are economically viable without taxpayer subsidies, will comply with all existing environmental protections, and have acceptable environmental and social impacts.

Conclusions

The Rocky Mountain West deserves a balanced energy policy that helps provide for our nation's needs by maximizing energy efficiency, promoting renewable energy resources, and ensuring protections for the region's communities, wildlife, water supplies and landscapes. Oil and gas is a part of our nation's energy portfolio but it must be developed in a manner that is socially and environmentally sustainable. We urge Congress to help achieve this balance through consideration and adoption of this Western Energy Agenda.