

Jonah in the Woods?

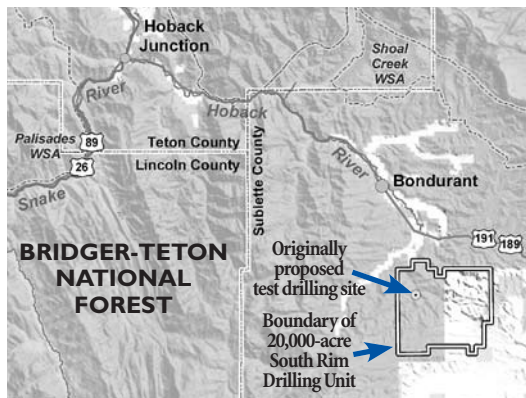
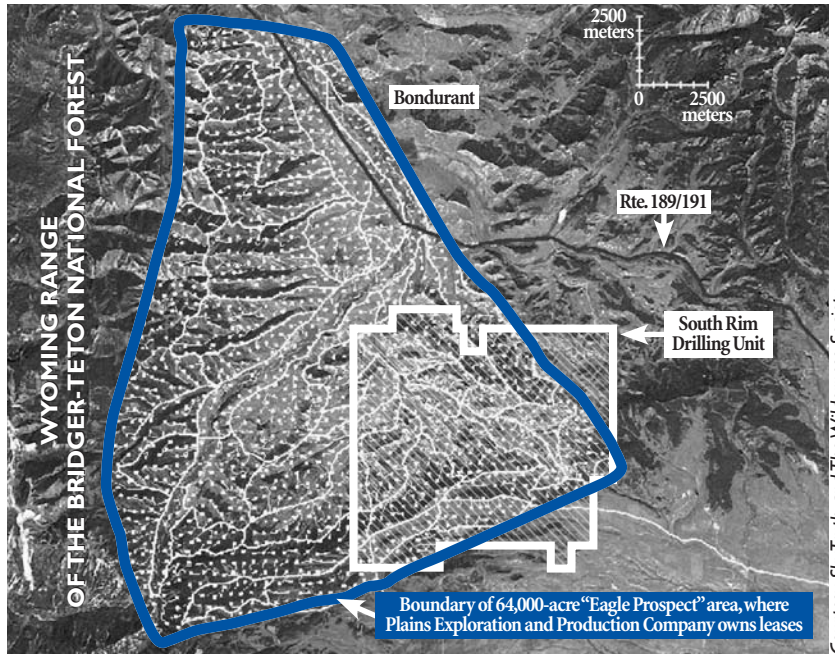
Energy company asks Forest Service to permit full field development in Upper Hoback.

By Dorothy Jankowsky
Communications Director

In June, the energy company that planned to drill exploratory gas wells near Bondurant in the Bridger-Teton National Forest asked the Forest Service to expand its environmental analysis and let the company develop all the leases it owns in the area instead.

The Forest Service received some 19,000 comments by the April 30 deadline on Plains Exploration and Production Company's original proposal to drill up to three exploratory wells within two miles of Hoback Ranches subdivision. Almost all were opposed to drilling in the forest, which apparently influenced the company's decision to postpone development until more environmental impact studies are prepared.

While Plain's request means there's now more time to research the consequences of drilling in an area biologists consider important wildlife habitat, it could also mean a more immediate expansion of drilling in the Hoback. The CEO of Plains has said he hopes to find gas reserves there on par with the highly industrialized Jonah gas field south of Pinedale.



The simulated aerial view above shows what the Bridger-Teton's Hoback Rim would look like if Plains Exploration and Production Company developed all the leases it owns south of Jackson.

Visit www.skytruth.org for additional views, and for a telling video, "The Upper Green River Valley: A View from Above."

The Forest Service hasn't issued a timeline for the revised Plains environmental impact statement yet, but we'll keep you posted. No matter how thorough the environmental analysis is, the Alliance

believes allowing any part of Bridger-Teton National Forest to become an industrialized gas field is unacceptable. ■ Our thanks to the Harder Foundation for help informing people about this issue.

Congressional action key to saving Wyoming Range

Earlier this summer, a Bridger-Teton National Forest official said the development of gas wells in the Hoback area is probably inevitable, despite overwhelming public opposition. "People have said 'Don't let them drill,' but that's not really an option right now," Big Piney District Ranger Greg Clark said. "Once the lease is issued, you've given [energy companies] certain rights that they can explore and exercise."

Clark's statement highlights the need for federal legislation to protect the forest from future oil and gas leasing, and to begin a process by which existing leases like the ones owned by Plains Exploration and Production Company could be bought out or retired. Sen. Craig Thomas had been working on such

a bill before his untimely death from leukemia on June 4, and now the torch passes to Sen. John Barrasso, appointed by Gov. Dave Freudenthal to serve as Wyoming's interim junior senator until voters choose Sen. Thomas' successor in 2008.

Gov. Freudenthal has urged Wyoming's congressional delegation to pass legislation withdrawing the Wyoming Range from oil and gas leasing, and you can help by adding your voice. Tell Sen. Mike Enzi, Sen. John Barrasso and Rep. Barbara Cubin that Wyoming is already doing its part to meet the nation's energy needs, and that responsible energy development means recognizing that some places are too special to drill. (Visit www.jhallyance.org/takeactioncontacts.htm for their contact info.) ■