

LOWER DOLORES WORKING GROUP FACT SHEET

Meeting #6

May 11, 2009

Minerals, oil and gas, and grazing

Agency perspective on minerals, oil and gas

Presenter: Tom Rice

Natural-resource specialist, Dolores Public Lands Office

The BLM manages all federal minerals under the surface of federal lands, as well as the federal minerals that lie beneath private surface (split estate). Four times a year, the BLM state office conducts a lease sale. Nominated properties are reviewed by local BLM personnel, who decide whether leases should be granted and under what conditions. The agency can apply lease stipulations (restrictions), or can defer some parcels from leasing because of resource concerns. When the lease sale takes place, the public has an opportunity to comment. When the agency wants to move forward with a lease, it must receive an application for permit to drill (“APD”) from the operator.

Most oil and gas activity in the region involves:

- Drilling for natural gas or oil in the Paradox Basin;
- Coal-bed methane extraction in the San Juan Basin (La Plata County and northern New Mexico) and
- Carbon-dioxide production on the McElmo Dome (in and around Canyons of the Ancients National Monument).



Wendy Mimiaga

Industry perspective on oil and gas

Presenter: Jim Felton

Communications manager for Bill Barrett Corp.

Bill Barrett Corp. has leased approximately 400,000 acres in the Paradox Basin in the local area. The target is natural gas in the Gothic shale layer. Extracting the gas from this thin layer has always been difficult, but new technology may make it more feasible.

Bill Barrett Corp. conducts seismic testing to reveal anomalies in the sub-surface that may suggest oil or gas resources. If the results are promising, an exploratory well is drilled. A single well costs \$5 million to \$6 million. It may be years before Bill Barrett Corp. knows whether this will be a viable field. The company has drilled about a dozen wells in the area so far.

Jim discussed some broad issues involving energy consumption in the United States and worldwide. He said that every year since this country’s inception, its demand for electricity has grown. Approximately 23 trillion cubic feet of natural gas per year is consumed in the United States, and this amount is expected to continue growing as a projected 100 million more people are added to the country by 2050.

Jim went on to say that domestic natural gas may offer a real opportunity for meeting energy needs. Natural gas is abundant in the United States and is cleaner-burning than coal. Renewable energy is still a small factor in the energy picture.

He said oil and gas is a \$23-billion-per-year industry in Colorado.

The Lower Dolores Management Plan Working Group is working to provide recommendations for updating the Dolores Public Lands Office (Forest Service/BLM) 1990 Dolores River Corridor Management Plan. The Working Group includes diverse stakeholders with many perspectives and interests in the Lower Dolores River Valley. Its goals are to gather information, identify values worthy of protection in the planning area, formulate ideas for protection of the values, and make recommendations to the Dolores Public Lands Office. The Working Group will meet until Fall 2009. Presentations, documents, meeting summaries, agendas and other information related to the Working Group process are posted at <http://ocs.fortlewis.edu/drd/>.

Lower Dolores
Working Group
Members & Alternates

Chester Anderson
Linda Bassi
Steve Beverlin
Ann Brown
Chris Burkett
Jon Callender
Randy Carver
Steve Chappell
Amber Clark
Scott Clow
Clint Cressler
Cole Crocker-Bedford
James Dietrich
Carolyn Dunmire
Nathan Fey
Jim Fisher
Lynn Gardner
Rick Gersch
Art Goodtimes
David Graf
Dave Harper
Vern Harrell
Al Heaton
Shauna Jensen
Rick Keck
Julie Kibel
Gerald Koppenhafer
Ted Kowalski
Tony & Peggy Littlejohn
Andy Logan
Joe Mahaffey
Meghan Maloney
Karel Miller
Ann Oliver
John Porter
Mike Preston
Larrie Rule
Rick Ryan
David Schneck
Lisa Schwantes
Don Schwindt
Leslie Sesler
Jim Siscoe
Bruce Smart
Dale Smith
Doug Stowe
Rowdy Suckla
Steve Trudeau
David Vackar
Chuck Wanner
Mely Whiting
John Whitney
Ernie Williams

Staff

Marsha Porter-Norton
Kathy Sherer
Gail Binkly
Gina Espeland

Agency perspective on grazing

Presenter: Steve Beverlin

Manager, Dolores Public Lands Office

Grazing permits on public lands are issued to private ranchers for a 10-year period. At the end of that period, the permit is reviewed. Within the next two years the DPLO must conduct a NEPA analysis on all its permits. There are 95 allotments across the DPLO landscape, and 110 permittees.

Permittees are responsible for maintenance of any range improvements (e.g., ponds, fences) they create. Permittees must deal with many issues, including recreational users, wildfire, soil conditions, wildlife, oil and gas, wild horses, and invasive species such as tamarisk.

Steve said most permittees care about the long-term health of the land and voluntarily reduce their livestock numbers during droughts.

Monitoring standards have to be met while livestock is on the land. BLM land must meet Colorado standards and guidelines for rangeland health.

Grazing-permittee perspective

Presenters: Al Heaton and Rowdy Suckla

Grazing can be beneficial to the landscape. Al said wildlife follows grazing cattle because the cattle chew off dead and decadent plants. Wild animals also appreciate the water wells and stock ponds built by ranchers. The entire ecosystem benefits.

Agriculture creates open space. If ranchers were to lose their grazing allotments they would have to subdivide their land because there is not enough private land available to support their livestock.

Grazing permittees said they don't really have conflicts with recreational users such as river rafters. They said everyone needs to respect everyone else, follow the multiple-use philosophy of public lands, and learn to get along.

“You can't starve money out of a cow.”
Group member, on why most ranchers take care of their range

Working Group discussions and thoughts

- Working Group members suggested finding out more about **impacts from and to livestock-grazing** within the individual reaches of the river. One of the special values of the Lower Dolores is “ecology”, which includes riparian vegetation. Properly managed grazing may actually improve that particular value. Working Group members said **there are some “bad apples” in the livestock business**, but they don't stay in business long. **The majority of ranchers are good stewards** of public lands.
- Members acknowledged the **economic benefits of energy production** but had **some concerns about impacts** in the Dolores River corridor, including sedimentation from oil and gas roads that aren't properly maintained, water usage and amounts, disposal of energy wastes, and the footprint of the infrastructure.

NO decisions or recommendations were made at this meeting.

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