



There is a right way to develop our Western public lands. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Wyoming made the right decision to expand drilling and fracking in the southern part of the state for the Continental Divide-Creston Project. The 1.1 million acres of available land, much of it already disturbed by prior drilling, proves there is plenty of room for smart energy exploration in the West.

Unfortunately, there are more examples of wrongheaded public land development, like the BLM's recent decision to bring drilling into Colorado's North Fork Valley. A region like the North Fork, well known for wineries, local agriculture and tourism, is exactly the kind of place that should be protected from the dangers associated with oil and gas development. As industrial drilling and fracking operations spread across the West, it's vital that the BLM and others pursue a balanced approach that protects lands important to our Western way of life and economy.

Responsible: Continental Divide-Creston Project

The Continental Divide-Creston (CD-C) Project in south-central Wyoming is an example of industry working in concert with the BLM to locate the right areas for oil and gas development.

As proposed, the CD-C will be one of the largest energy developments of its kind—nearly 9,000 wells are planned on 1.1 million acres.



Photo courtesy of Biodiversity Conservation Alliance

Instead of drilling untouched lands that provide clean water, support wildlife, and sustain local economies, the CD-C Project is proposed for a massive chunk of land previously drilled for oil and gas. The project area is heavily industrialized, currently supporting more than 4,000 wells drilled during the 1950s, along with roads and other energy infrastructure. Much of the wildlife inside the CD-C Project area, including the sensitive desert elk and sage grouse, were long ago driven out by industrial oil and gas development.

The CD-C Project is not without impacts. Industry is proposing to effectively double the size of the existing project area, constructing significant new infrastructure, including well pads, pipelines, compressors, roads and power lines. It will be necessary for the BLM to ensure companies employ directional drilling technologies and use existing well pads when possible to minimize additional surface disturbances. There are also concerns about the air quality impacts of such an enormous project. The Pinedale Anticline oil and gas field in western Wyoming has terrible air pollution problems stemming from energy development. The BLM needs to carefully consider how to alleviate these impacts so the air remains clean for workers and nearby residents.

With thoughtful mitigation, in collaboration with local communities, the CD-C Project can be a success story for responsible energy development. It validates that there is plenty of space in the Rocky Mountain West to balance responsible energy development with other important uses of our public lands, including hunting, fishing, grazing, and outdoor recreation activities.

Irresponsible: North Fork Valley Oil and Gas Lease Sale

The planned sale of oil and gas leases in western Colorado's North Fork Valley is an example of how out of balance the process of leasing Western public lands has become at times.

On February 14, 2013, the BLM is scheduled to lease over 20,500 acres across North Fork Valley, a unique area known as the "breadbasket" of Colorado. The valley is dotted with cattle and bison ranches, organic farms, century old orchards, and a number of vineyards and wineries.

The lease sale is based off of a 1989 resource management plan (RMP), a document that is supposed to outline all current resource issues and guide decisions on all BLM lands. The problem is that in the twenty-three years since the RMP was written, the North Fork Valley has undergone significant changes. The valley's West Elk Viticultural Area has become a renowned location for growing grapes and winemaking. Twelve wineries account for \$2 million annually in direct sales and an additional \$5 - \$10 million in indirect sales. The North Fork Valley is also the center of a growing sustainable farm and ranch industry, which supply food markets and restaurants across the region.

The RMP, and thus the proposed lease sale, also fail to account for a number of other important community resources. The plan is ignorant of the proximity of leased parcels to schools, recreation facilities or pools. Nor does the plan consider watersheds that provide clean water to the Valley's towns—Paonia, Crawford, and Hotchkiss—and to farms and ranches. It also ignores important wildlife migration routes and critical riparian areas.

In May 2012, the BLM admitted problems and decided to defer the North Fork Valley lease sale. The BLM cited a need for deeper analysis, a promise the government has not upheld. A mere five months later, the BLM has continued to base its decisions on the outdated 1989 analysis.

Oil and gas leasing should not occur in the North Fork Valley until the BLM undertakes a rigorous analysis and updates the RMP to reflect the interests of the community and its modern economy.



Photo courtesy of Celia Roberts