



File Code: 1950-3

Date: December 26, 2006

Dear Interested Public Land User:

The Caribou-Targhee National Forest will be conducting an environmental analysis for oil and gas leasing on the Caribou administrative unit of the Forest and the Curlew National Grassland in southeast Idaho, with small areas in northern Utah and western Wyoming (see attached locator map). Since the analysis will likely address controversial issues and alternatives and could involve significant effects, the analysis will be documented in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will be participating as a cooperating agency on the project because the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, as amended, establishes the BLM as the agency responsible to issue and administer oil and gas leases on Federal lands.

## Background

The Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act of 1987 (FOOGLRA) requires the Forest Service to evaluate National Forest System (NFS) lands that are legally open to leasing for potential oil and gas leasing and development, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. FOOGLRA also establishes Forest Service consent authority for leasing prior to the BLM offering NFS lands for lease. Leasing on NFS lands is done under the authority of the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 (MLA), as amended, and implementing regulations at 36 CFR 228, subpart E, and 43 CFR 3100. The MLA provides that all public lands are open to oil and gas leasing unless they have been closed by a specific land order. The Caribou administrative unit of the Caribou-Targhee NF and the Curlew National Grassland (herein jointly referred to as "the Caribou") do not have Land and Resource Management Plan direction or decisions that determine which NFS lands are administratively available for oil/gas leasing or the conditions (stipulations) necessary to lease those specific lands.

Since the FOOGLRA was signed into law, there has been little industry interest in oil and gas leasing on the Caribou, and no leases have been issued in the past 15 years. The BLM Idaho State Office has recently received Expressions of Interest for leasing portions of the Caribou for oil and gas.

The intent of the applicable laws and regulations is to lease appropriate NFS lands and provide a reasonable opportunity to explore for, discover, and produce economic oil and gas reserves from available Federal lands, while meeting the requirements of environmental laws and protecting surface resources and interests not compatible with such activities.



## **Proposed Action**

The Forest Service and BLM propose to conduct the analysis and decide which NFS lands on the Caribou will be made available for oil and gas leasing and under what terms and conditions (stipulations) these specific lands may be leased. As part of the analysis, the Forest Service will identify those areas that would be administratively available for leasing subject to the terms and conditions of the standard oil and gas lease form, and subject to constraints that would require the use of lease stipulations such as limiting surface use, timing restrictions, and/or prohibiting surface occupancy in accordance with the Caribou Land and Resource Management Plan (Caribou Plan, revised 2003) and the Curlew National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan (Curlew Plan, 2002). To comply with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, no road construction or reconstruction would be allowed in Inventoried Roadless Areas (see attached Inventoried Roadless Area map for a delineation of the IRAs on the Caribou). Leasing will be considered in some roadless areas with no surface occupancy stipulations.

The analysis will also: (1) identify alternatives to the proposed action; (2) project the type/amount of post-leasing activity that is reasonably foreseeable; and (3) analyze the reasonable foreseeable impacts of projected post-leasing activity [36 CFR 228.102(c)].

## **Preliminary Alternatives**

All alternatives studied in detail must fall within the scope of the purpose and need for action and will generally tier to and comply with the Caribou and Curlew Plans.

Federal law requires the evaluation of a “no action alternative”. Under the No Action/No Lease alternative, no NFS lands on the Caribou would be made available for oil/gas leasing at this time.

The other identified preliminary alternative would allow leasing on some NFS lands consistent with the Caribou and Curlew Plans. This alternative would be similar to the proposed action but would consider road construction or reconstruction in some of the inventoried roadless areas in the event of a future change in inventoried roadless area direction, consistent with the Caribou Plan (there are no IRAs on the Curlew National Grassland).

Other alternatives which would involve making some lands unavailable for leasing and other lands available for leasing with specific lease stipulations for the protection of surface resources and other interests may be developed based on public input.

## **Decisions to be Made**

The Forest Supervisor, Caribou-Targhee National Forest, will decide which lands on the Caribou will be administratively available for oil and gas leasing, and determine which conditions or constraints for the protection of non-mineral resources and interests will be applied to specific lands [36 CFR 228.102(d)].

The Forest Supervisor will also authorize the BLM to offer specific lands for lease, subject to Forest Service identified stipulations that will be attached to the lease [36 CFR 228.102(e)].

The Forest Supervisor will amend, if necessary, the Caribou and Curlew Land and Resource Management Plans to accommodate oil and gas leasing if the decision is made to lease NFS lands on the Caribou.

The BLM is responsible for issuing and administering oil and gas leases under the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, as amended, and Federal regulations at 43 CFR 3101.7. The BLM State Director (Idaho, Utah, and/or Wyoming) will decide whether or not to offer for lease specific lands, in their respective states, that have been authorized by the Caribou-Targhee Forest Supervisor for leasing with the Forest Service designated lease stipulations.

### **Preliminary Identification of Issues**

Important goals for the project are to meet the legal requirements for evaluating National Forest System (NFS) lands and make the required decisions. Preliminary issues are anticipated to involve potential effects to wildlife (including big game winter range and calving/fawning areas), biological diversity (including Management Indicator Species), water and soil resources, social and economic settings, cultural and paleontological resources, inventoried roadless area characteristics, visual resources, traditional cultural properties (including plant and mineral gathering areas and sacred sites), forest transportation system, noxious weeds, special management areas (designated in the Caribou and Curlew Plans) and air quality. Specific issues will be developed through review of public comments and internal review.

### **Providing Comments**

The Forest Service requests comments on the nature and scope of the environmental, social, and economic issues, and possible alternatives related to oil and gas leasing on the Caribou. To assist us in identifying and considering significant issues and concerns related to the proposed action, and to develop appropriate alternatives, your comments should be as specific as possible. Only comments which address relevant issues and concerns will be considered and formally addressed in an appendix to the EIS. To be most helpful, comments should be received by February 16, 2007. Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project and will be available for public inspection.

Written comments should be sent to: Steve Robison, Oil and Gas Team Leader, Caribou-Targhee National Forest, 1405 Hollipark Dr., Idaho Falls, ID 83401. Electronic comments can be submitted in rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to [comments-intermtn-caribou-targhee@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-intermtn-caribou-targhee@fs.fed.us). Please include "Caribou Oil and Gas Leasing EIS" on the subject line.

## **Public Meetings**

Four public meetings are scheduled to describe the proposal and to provide an opportunity for public input. We invite you to attend any of these meetings. The four scoping meetings are planned as follows:

January 16: 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., Tribal Business Center, Pima Dr., Fort Hall, ID.

January 16: 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., Westside Ranger District Office, 4350 Cliffs Dr., Pocatello, ID.

January 18: 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., Soda Springs Ranger District Office, 410 E. Hooper Ave., Soda Springs, ID., and

January 18: 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., Montpelier Ranger District Office, 322 N. 4<sup>th</sup>, Montpelier, ID.

Written comments will be accepted at these meetings. The Forest Service will work with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal government to address issues that could significantly or uniquely affect them.

The project will be listed in the Caribou-Targhee NF Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions and this scoping letter will be sent to local tribal interests, interested agencies, organizations, media-contacts and the Forest-wide mailing list.

## **Contact**

For additional information about the project, contact: Lynn Ballard, Public Affairs Officer, Caribou-Targhee National Forest, 1405 Hollipark Drive, Idaho Falls, ID 83401; phone (208) 557-5765. For technical information contact: Steve Robison, Oil and Gas Team Leader, (208) 557-5799.

Sincerely,

/s/ Lawrence A. Timchack  
LAWRENCE A. TIMCHAK  
Forest Supervisor