

# **Oil and Gas Leasing EIS on Lands Administered by the Dixie National Forest**

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The Dixie National Forest will be preparing a forest-wide environmental impact statement (EIS) for oil and gas leasing. As the agency responsible for Federal lease issuance and administration, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will participate as a cooperating agency. The State of Utah will also be cooperating on the EIS.

### **Reasons for the Analysis**

The Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act of 1987 requires the Forest Service to evaluate National Forest System lands for potential oil and gas leasing and establishes Forest Service consent authority for leasing prior to the BLM offering National Forest System lands for lease. The oil and gas industry continues to express interest in leasing portions of the Dixie National Forest and interest has increased due to the demand for oil and gas, high prices, and discoveries of oil and gas reserves in other areas of Utah with similar geologic conditions.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 requires an environmental review of major federal actions that have the potential to significantly affect the quality of the environment. Since it is likely that the analysis of future oil and gas leasing in the Dixie National Forest will address controversial issues and future oil and gas activities could have significant environmental effects, the Agencies have decided to prepare an EIS for this Proposed Action.

### **Proposed Action**

The EIS analysis area includes the entire Dixie National Forest, with the exception of designated wilderness areas. As part of the analysis, the Forest Service will identify areas that would be available for leasing subject to the terms and conditions of the standard oil and gas lease form, or subject to constraints that would require the use of lease stipulations such as those prohibiting surface occupancy. The analysis will also: 1) identify alternatives to the proposed action, including not allowing leasing (no action), 2) project the type/amount of post-leasing activity that is reasonably foreseeable, 3) analyze the reasonably foreseeable impacts of projected post-leasing activity [36 CFR 228.102(c)], and 4) be used to develop an amendment to the Forest Plan if necessary.

### **Method of Analysis**

The Agencies will review input received from the public during the scoping comment period and combine this with other information to develop issues and a range of alternatives to be evaluated in the EIS. The Agencies will prepare a Reasonably Foreseeable Development Scenario (RFDS) for future oil and gas exploration and development activities that will be based on available information related to occurrence and development potential of oil and gas. The RFDS will describe the scope of exploration activity for the next 15 years for seismic surveys or other remote exploration methods, and access roads and facility development for exploratory drilling. It will also describe facilities, activities, and disturbance related to the development of one producing field on the National Forest over this same time.

To make the analysis as site-specific as possible, the baseline environmental conditions within each Ranger District on the Forest will be described using existing resource information. The environmental impacts will be evaluated for each Ranger District by superimposing the RFDS onto the baseline environmental conditions and describing the potential environmental impacts that would occur. Environmental impacts will be described on a direct and indirect basis and also in a cumulative manner with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions occurring within the cumulative effects analysis area.

The baseline conditions and environmental impacts will be described in a series of technical reports, one for each environmental resource that is evaluated in the EIS. This baseline description and impact analysis will then be summarized in the Draft EIS along with other information related to: purpose and need, applicable permits and authorizations, issues, proposed action and alternatives, consultation and coordination, list of preparers and reviewers, references, glossary, and index.

The Draft EIS will be distributed for public comment and the comments received will be considered and responded to by the Agencies. Changes as necessary will be made to the EIS to reflect the input from the public and a Final EIS will be prepared. The Agencies will use the Final EIS to prepare separate Records of Decision as described in the following section. The Final EIS and the Records of Decision will be distributed for public review and comment. Members of the public who disagree with the decisions will be able to appeal the decisions following the appeal processes of the Agencies.

### **Decisions to be Made**

The Dixie Forest Supervisor will decide which lands will be administratively available for oil and gas leasing along with associated conditions or constraints, and will authorize the BLM to offer specific lands for lease. The Dixie National Forest will also propose to amend the Forest Plan, if necessary, to incorporate the leasing decisions and other changes as indicated in the analysis. The BLM Utah State Director will decide whether to offer for lease, those National Forest System lands authorized for leasing by the Forest Service. The responsible officials of the Forest Service and BLM will release separate Records of Decision. The Records of Decision will decide which lands will be administratively available for oil and gas leasing along with associated conditions or constraints. The Records of Decision will not approve any specific surface disturbing activities. Environmental impacts of future oil and gas exploration and development activities would undergo future, project-specific NEPA analyses.

### **Agency Contact**

To obtain more information on this project, or provide input on the analysis, members of the public may contact: Susan Baughman, Oil and Gas Leasing Project Manager, Dixie National Forest, 1789 N. Wedgewood Lane, Cedar City, Utah 84720; phone: (435) 865-3703; fax: (435) 865-3791; e-mail: [dixie\\_oil\\_gas\\_eis\\_comments@fs.fed.us](mailto:dixie_oil_gas_eis_comments@fs.fed.us).