

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR OIL AND GAS LEASING ON LANDS ADMINISTERED BY THE FISHLAKE NATIONAL FOREST

INTRODUCTION

The Fishlake National Forest is conducting an environmental analysis to be documented in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to disclose the effects of potential leasing of National Forest System lands administered by the Fishlake National Forest for oil and gas exploration and development. The analysis will evaluate lands administered by the Fishlake National Forest that are legally open to potential leasing. Currently there are no lands which are closed to leasing by law, regulation, or order.

Based on this analysis, the Forest Supervisor will decide which lands to make administratively available for leasing subject to standard lease terms and conditions and those that would be available with lease stipulations that would mitigate effects to other resources and protect non-mineral interests (Federal Regulations at 36 CFR 228.102).

Leasing alternatives to be considered and evaluated will range from not making any lands available for leasing to leasing all legally open lands with standard lease terms and conditions only. Other alternatives will involve variations of areas that would and would not be available for leasing. Available areas would involve variations of leasing with standard lease terms and conditions only and subject to leasing with stipulations that would limit occupancy, certain activities, or the times when operations could take place.

The potential effects of each alternative will be based on a Reasonably Foreseeable Development Scenario (RFDS) developed by the Bureau of Land Management in cooperation with the Forest Service. The RFDS is a prediction of the amount and type of oil and gas exploration and development that is reasonably foreseeable if leasing occurs, based on current knowledge of oil and gas occurrence potentials as well as geologic and economic factors.

The analysis is being conducted as required by and in conformance with the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, as amended, the Federal Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act of 1987, the National Forest Management Act of 1976, Energy Policy Act of 2005, National

Environmental Policy Act of 1969, Federal regulations contained in 36 CFR 228.102, and other applicable laws, regulations, and agency policies.

The Forest Service, as the surface management agency, must decide which lands will be administratively available for leasing and with what stipulations. As the leasing agency, BLM must decide which lands to offer for lease with appropriate lease terms, conditions, and stipulations. The Forest Service is the lead agency for conducting the analysis and preparing the EIS. The BLM is participating as a cooperating agency. The Forest Service and BLM will make their respective decisions based on this EIS to be documented in separate Records of Decision. The State of Utah is also participating as a cooperating agency at their request, based on their permitting and management responsibilities for oil and gas operations on all lands within the State.

LANDS INVOLVED

Lands considered for oil and gas leasing include lands designated as the Fishlake National Forest and those lands of the Dixie National Forest administered by the Fishlake National Forest (Boulder Mountain area, Freemont River Ranger District). The analysis area includes portions of Millard, Sevier, Beaver, Wayne, Iron, Garfield, and Piute Counties, Utah. The Forest is divided into the Fillmore, Beaver, Richfield, and Fremont River Ranger Districts. The Fishlake National Forest encompasses approximately 1,539,737 acres, of which 1,461,228 acres are National Forest System lands. The remaining lands are private and State inholdings.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The Forest Service and BLM must consider National Forest System lands for potential leasing under authorities granted by the Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act of 1987 (O&G Leasing Reform Act). The respective leasing decisions are subject to analysis and public disclosure under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The analysis must be conducted in accordance with the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, as amended (Mineral Leasing Act), Energy Security Act of 1980, O&G Leasing Reform Act, and Federal Regulations contained in 43 CFR 3100 and 36 CFR 228.102.

No oil and gas leasing has occurred on the Fishlake National Forest since the O&G Leasing Reform Act became effective in 1987. This act provided oil and gas leasing authority to the Forest Service that it did not have previously. It provided that the BLM cannot lease National Forest System lands over the objection of the Forest Service.

Therefore, lease analyses and decisions regarding availability of National Forest System lands for leasing became a Forest Service responsibility as well as a BLM responsibility. Industry interest in leasing lands administered by the Fishlake National Forest had been low since 1987, so the process of evaluating lands for oil and gas leasing was not a high priority by the agencies. However, interest in leasing lands administered by the Fishlake National Forest has increased over the last few years prompted by recent increases in oil and gas prices and demand and discovery of a new oil field adjacent to the Forest with similar geologic conditions. BLM has received numerous Expressions of Interest from industry requesting that lands within the Fishlake National Forest be offered for lease.

The purpose and need for action is to fulfill the requirements of the O&G Leasing Reform Act and other applicable laws and regulations to evaluate National Forest System lands for potential oil and gas leasing and make specific decisions regarding areas that would be made available for leasing. For areas determined to be available for leasing, the responsible officials must also decide whether restrictions on surface occupancy and surface operations are needed to protect non-mineral interests consistent with management objectives. These restrictions would be included in leases as stipulations. Lease stipulations require restrictions in addition to regulatory requirements already required under laws and regulations outlined in BLM's Standard Lease Form (Form 3100-11, June 1988) as standard lease terms.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Forest Service proposes is to decide which lands administered by the Fishlake National Forest will be made administratively available for oil and gas leasing and, for available lands, determine what stipulations to include in leases for specific lands to protect non-mineral interests. The Forest Service also proposes to authorize BLM to offer available lands for lease with the required lease stipulations. The BLM has received numerous Expressions for Leasing for lands administered by the Fishlake National Forest. Under the applicable laws, the Forest Service must evaluate these lands for lease and provide response regarding leasing of these lands to BLM.

The Bureau of Land Management proposes to offer available lands for lease with the required Forest Service and BLM oil and gas lease stipulations.

LEAD AGENCY AND CONTACTS

U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Fishlake National Forest
115 East 900 North
Richfield, Utah 84701
435-896-9233

Responsible Official: Mary C. Erickson
Forest Supervisor
Fishlake National Forest

Interdisciplinary
Team Leader: Carter Reed
Geologist, Fishlake National Forest
Phone: 435-636-3547

Project Email Address: fishlake_oil_and_gas_leasing_eis@fs.fed.us

COOPERATING AGENCIES

U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management
Utah State Office
440 West 200 South, Suite 500
P.O. Box 84145-0155
Salt Lake City, Utah 84101
801-539-4031

State of Utah
Office of the Governor, Public Lands Policy Coordination
5110 State Office Building
P.O. Box 141107
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-1107
801-527-9801