



NEWS RELEASE

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FOREST SERVICE PUBLISHES NEW RULE FOR ENERGY-RELATED PERMITS

WASHINGTON, Feb.9 – The Forest Service today announced a new rule that permits it to respond quickly to applications for oil-and-gas exploration on Forest Service land already under federal leases.

The rule is a categorical exclusion for land under lease that has already undergone environmental analysis consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) guidelines. The additional analysis previously required by a new oil-and-gas exploration and development application took a minimum of six months. With the new rule, an application can be processed much faster unless there are extraordinary circumstances such as the presence of threatened or endangered species or their designated habitat, wilderness areas, inventoried roadless areas, wetlands, and archeological or historic sites. The categorical exclusion will not apply in these areas.

This change in policy is a response to Executive Order 13212 to expedite the increased supply and availability of energy to the nation. It allows for streamlining the application process for permits to drill and other energy-related permits in an environmentally sound manner.

The Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) acts as the onshore oil-and-gas leasing agent for the federal government. The BLM schedules and conducts competitive bid lease sales, collects the bonus bids and issues leases to the successful bidders. No permit for oil-and-gas exploration for development on National Forest System lands will be approved by the BLM without the Forest Service analyzing and approving the proponent's surface use plan of operations covering proposed surface-disturbing activities within the lease area.

The new rule was published in the Federal Register for public review and comment on Dec. 13, 2005. There was a 60-day comment period and comments received during that period were considered in the preparation of the final rule. The final rule will be effective immediately upon its publication in the Federal Register.

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