Phoonswadi-Brewer, Sean

From: NPL_AR
Subject: Trout Unlimited NPL scoping comments
Attachments: TroutUnlimited_ NPL_ScopingComments_5-19-11.pdf

"Steven Brutger" <SBrutger@tu.org>
05/19/2011 11:24 AM

To <NPL_EIS_WY@blm.gov>
cc "Cathy Purves" <CPurves@tu.org>
Subject Trout Unlimited NPL scoping comments

Kellie,

Here are Trout Unlimited's scoping comments for the NPL project. Thank you for allowing us to participate in this process and please let me know if you have any questions.

All the best, Steven

Steven Brutger
Wyoming Energy Coordinator
Trout Unlimited
Sportsmen's Conservation Project
cell: 307-438-2596 office: 307-332-6700 x11 (See attached file: TroutUnlimited_ NPL_ScopingComments_5-19-11.pdf)

Sent Via Email to: NPL_EIS_WY@blm.gov

May 19, 2011

Kellie Roadifer, Project Manager
NPL Natural Gas Development Project
BLM Pinedale Field Office
1625 West Pine Street
P.O. Box 768
Pinedale, WY 82941

Re: Scoping Comments for the Environmental Impact Statement for the Normally Pressured Lance Natural Gas Development Project

Dear Kellie,

Please accept Trout Unlimited's scoping comments on the Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed Normally Pressured Lance Natural Gas Development Project (NPL). As an organization we seek to find balanced solutions for this project that ensure fish and wildlife habitat is protected through responsible energy development. TU appreciates the opportunity to participate in the public commenting process.

Background

Trout Unlimited (TU) has a strong base support of hunters and anglers who depend on Wyoming's natural resources for their multi-use activities both now and in the future. Members of our organization value these public lands that sustain some of the cleanest water, the healthiest habitats and finest fishing and hunting in North America. TU is composed of more than 140,000 members and has dedicated staff and volunteers working toward the protection of sensitive ecological systems necessary to support robust native and wild trout and salmon populations in their respective ranges. In Wyoming, TU's membership of more than 1,500 anglers and 13 chapters spend countless volunteer hours each year working on projects that meet the mission of the organization.

Comments for Scoping

The NPL project is area is located within some of the best fish and wildlife habitat in the West; it is also adjacent to what is already one of the nation's largest natural gas plays. Fish and wildlife have suffered as a result of the development that has taken place within the Jonah and Anticline project areas. However, the experience with development in the area has helped us learn how we can more effectively reduce impacts from development through careful planning, analysis

and development techniques. With this in mind we offer the following recommendations for analysis that should be completed during the EIS process as well as several development practices that we believe can help reduce impacts to fish and wildlife.

Groundwater/Surface Water Concerns

- The BLM must include a description and analysis of the water available for development and use under the state's regulatory, administrative and legal arrangements commonly known as the Law of the (Colorado) River. This project is located adjacent to the Green River and New Fork River, both a part of the Upper Green River watershed drainage, and the Upper Colorado River basin.

- The impacts of alterations in river flows on endangered and threatened species must be assessed. This is of particular concern with respect to the Endangered Fish Recovery Implementation Program for which major efforts have already been incurred in the Colorado River Basin. Given the position of the Green River and its tributary, the New Fork River, at the upper end of the Colorado River system, changes in water quality and quantity can have ramifications for reaches of the Colorado River well below the affected area.

- The significant size and scale of this project potentially could impact major alterations of aquifer hydraulic characteristics, flow patterns, and subsurface water quality over large areas, not only from the high number of projected wells within the project area but from adjacent drilling plays as well. Included in these impacts are the drilling activities themselves, de-watering, isolation, reclamation, waste disposal, and excavation activities associated with the drilling and production processes. TU recommends the BLM review and analyze all of the above.

- Often, oil and gas exploration and drilling can impact water uses, quality of flows and returns to surface rivers, and land use and vegetation, including rangelands used for grazing and riparian areas. Based on past and current water quality and quantity studies occurring within the Pinedale BLM resource area and the Pinedale Anticline natural gas field, the necessity to develop and engage an adequate monitoring program is extremely important. Rather than wait until contamination events occur, such as those that were found in the Pinedale Anticline and surrounding areas resulting in well contamination and livestock deaths, an adequate monitoring program must be implemented that produces data that describes hydrogeologic conditions and has the ability to detect potential groundwater impacts due to natural gas development. TU suggests the BLM refer to the Geomatrix Hydrologic Model (2008) used for the Pinedale Anticline as a basis for establishing such a monitoring system.

- Lack of existing groundwater and surface water interaction/exchange is currently not quantified in the Jonah development area. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must include a requirement that monitoring wells be established within and adjacent to the drilling project's area, which borders the Jonah field on three sides.

- Inventories must be completed of existing and abandoned oil and gas wells within the project area, inventories of water well locations, and coordination of all of these inventories to assure that the databases contain no discrepancies or irregularities that eventually could affect future monitoring and water quality results.

- The EIS must include an assessment impact to regional and local air quality associated with this large of a project. In addition to the obvious air quality concerns, it is also of particular concern to TU from a fisheries aspect. The potential for water quality impacts and eventual declines in water quality to a coldwater fisheries system, such as those in the Green River and New Fork River, from poor air quality and pollution depositions impacts coldwater fisheries, adjacent riparian and stream vegetation, and aquatic insect life.

- Baseline monitoring of water wells, streams, and the Green River and New Fork River must be implemented prior to exploration and development of any oil/gas well. This will provide a solid database for evaluation should future water quality changes occur once drilling begins. The ability to detect such water quality changes due to any number of incidents related to the drilling of natural gas wells is dependent on background information that would be supplied through the pre-development baseline inventory.

- The BLM must include an analysis on the impact to local and regional recreational fisheries use and businesses that depend on the coldwater fisheries within this region. Any impacts to water quality in this high quality watershed would not only significantly affect native and wild trout in these stream reaches, but the local and regional recreational use and businesses depending on these rivers.

- The BLM must consider and complete a comprehensive analysis of the cumulative impacts to aquatic life resources. This analysis must include potential impacts to the Ross Butte Management Area which lies adjacent to the NPL and next to the Green and New Fork Rivers.

- The NPL project is located within the 100-year floodplain, including numerous drainages that flow into the Green and New Fork Rivers. The BLM must account for ramifications from heavy silt and sedimentation flows that occur naturally from weather-related events and from the impacts associated with drilling activities, such as clearing an 18-acre or larger well pad free of vegetation.

- Based on the climate, precipitation, and soils regimes for the project area, the BLM should include an analysis which evaluates impacts from sedimentation and soil erosion caused by winds, stormwater runoff from construction activities, and roads.

- All development plans and activities must adhere to the Pinedale BLM Final Resource Management Plan (RMP)/Record of Decision (ROD) of November 2008. This includes all mitigation guidelines which are outlined in Appendix 3 of the ROD.

- A comprehensive water quality threshold matrix should be designed that defines a process for managing for any water quality and quantity issues that might arise from the large scale of this project, and when added to the mix of other oil, gas, and other energy development projects in the resource area.

Terrestrial Concerns

- Big game will once again be impacted by the development of this proposed natural gas field. In spite of the proposed plans to limit the number of well pads per section, the plan calls for 3,500 additional wells being drilled in critical range for mule deer and pronghorn antelope. Additionally, impacts could affect the moose population which inhabits the Green River and New Fork riparian areas. The EIS should include a Mitigation Plan similar to the *revised* Wildlife Mitigation and Threshold Plan developed for the Pinedale Anticline.

- The BLM should maximize reclamation plans that enhance the growth of shrub establishment, diversity of forbs and grasses, and phase each pad development with a thorough baseline vegetative inventory that accounts for age and class of vegetation that is to be disturbed. In areas where vegetation is in a later seral stage or declining stage of productivity, consideration should be given to developing that area first in order to accelerate the revegetation and enhancement of the current ecology.

- Properly implemented revegetation efforts to the areas of impact must include a collaborative monitoring protocol by both industry and agency personnel. As it currently happens, monitoring of the Jonah Field is the responsibility of the industry officials, according to the Jonah Reclamation Plan (2008). Loss of productive and critical habitat areas places undue hardships on wildlife survival; it also indirectly affects local businesses and the state wildlife management agency when the numbers of hunting permits are reduced in order to account for the loss of big game populations.

- The EIS must include the latest revised Wyoming Game and Fish *"Recommendations for Development of Oil and Gas Resources in Crucial and Important Wildlife Habitats"* (2010). New data based on research efforts must be incorporated into the EIS and mitigation plans, including newly identified habitat use areas, transition areas, offset implications, and timing restrictions.

- Sage grouse habitat occurs within the proposed project site. At one time, the area which the Jonah Field now encompasses was considered a prime sage grouse habitat area. The BLM must not allow natural gas development to occur in the manner and to the level that occurred on the Jonah, which resulted in the loss of sage grouse within the area. To reiterate, the development of strong reclamation plans for sage grouse must be included in any mitigation plans in the EIS. In addition, the BLM must comply with the sage grouse core conservation measures developed

by the sage grouse working groups, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

Air Quality

- Dangerous emissions from oil and gas development continue to plague the Sublette County area. The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality's 2009 technical analysis of the air quality in the region found that 94% of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) and 60% of nitrogen oxides (NOx) –the two primary contributors to problematic emissions—are attributable to oil and gas production and development. The use of natural gas compressors, though considered less polluting than diesel compressors, nevertheless present a significant source of emissions into the atmosphere. The EIS should contain language that calls for the use of best available technology and equipment to decrease impacts to air quality.

- Closed-loop piping systems must be mandatory in the project design, including piping condensates, water, gas production, and waste.

- The proposal calls for developing 350 wells per year which results in a significant amount of emissions being released into an area that may not meet compliance with federal ozone standards. The EIS should require a phased approach that uses the best management practices which lessen impacts to air and the rest of the environment.

- The combined effect of the proposed project and the Jonah Field project must be evaluated in the EIS. Though the proponents are asking for a "smooth transition" from the Jonah to the NPL, it is questionable that the entire Jonah Field will be shut down by the end of 2013 (the expected implementation of the NPL project). Technical air quality analysis must be required prior to the full scale approval of the development of 350 wells per year.

Conclusion

When evaluating this project we sincerely hope that the BLM takes a hard look at potential impacts to ground and surface water, terrestrial and aquatic habitats, the indirect affects that many sportsmen will experience with a potential loss in hunting opportunities, and air quality as well as the cumulative effects of development in the Pinedale and Rock Springs field offices. Through analysis and planning the BLM can significantly decrease the impacts to fish and wildlife associated with this project. Please feel free to contact us with questions regarding this project any time.

Sincerely,

Steven Brutger
Wyoming Energy Coordinator

Trout Unlimited
250 North 1st Street
Lander WY 82520
307-332-6700 x11
sbrutger@tu.org

Cathy Purves
Science & Technical Advisor
Trout Unlimited
250 North 1st Street
Lander, WY 82520
307-332-6700 x10
cpurves@tu.org