



For Immediate Release
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Sportsmen Coalition Angered That BLM Plans Another Oil and Gas Lease in the Greater Little Mountain Area

Southwest Wyoming grassroots campaign focused on protecting “invaluable” hunting, fishing and recreational opportunities in Sweetwater County

ROCK SPRINGS, Wyo. – To preserve the natural splendor, abundant wildlife and recreational opportunities around Little Mountain, a sportsmen coalition filed protests today with the Bureau of Land Management to stop another proposed oil and gas lease in the popular recreational area of southwestern Wyoming.

The 1,753-acre greater Little Mountain parcel is one of 84 parcels statewide – totaling more than 67,000 acres – that the BLM Wyoming State Office plans to include on the June 2, 2009 auction block. The greater Little Mountain parcel, on the east side of Potter Mountain near Brooks Draw and Elk Butte, is situated in a crucial mule deer range and a sage-grouse core area and is adjacent to an elk migration corridor.

This is the third time in less than a year that the Greater Little Mountain Coalition has protested leases in this part of Sweetwater County. Last November, after receiving 127 formal protests, the BLM decided to remove 13 of 14 parcels that it proposed to lease in the Little Mountain area. Opposition came from members of the public, Wyoming Governor Dave Freudenthal, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Sweetwater County Board of County Commissioners and members of the Greater Little Mountain Coalition - broad-based group that includes several organizations dedicated to protecting wildlife habitat for hunting, fishing and other recreational purposes.

"It's unfortunate that hunters, anglers and Wyoming families have to keep fighting this battle over and over," said Walt Gasson, Green River native and executive director of the Wyoming Wildlife Federation. "The fact that so many people have protested these leases speaks volumes about how precious this area is."

Although limited energy development is already occurring in this scenic part of southwest Wyoming, public sentiment remains strongly against further leasing and energy development because Little Mountain is one of the state's most popular hunting and wildlife viewing areas. Energy development there would bring new roads that would reduce vital cover for the elk, increasing their vulnerability and decreasing the number of trophy-size bulls.

Since 1990, the greater Little Mountain area has benefited from more than \$2 million in riparian habitat restoration projects funded by various private groups and state and federal agencies. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department has also spent more than \$350,000 on habitat-improvement projects in the area. In addition, local hunters, anglers, teachers, Boy Scouts and wildlife enthusiasts have helped with on-the-ground habitat projects and monitoring efforts.

"The Little Mountain area is an invaluable part of our heritage and it's our responsibility to be good stewards of the land," said Steve Martin, president of Bowhunters of Wyoming. "It's disheartening to think that all the money and hard work that helped restore this habitat could be so easily lost."

Many local citizens have joined the Little Mountain lease protests after seeing what happened to the landscape north and south of Rock Springs in the oil and gas fields of Pinedale and Colorado.

"We're not against oil and gas drilling, but they don't have to be everywhere," said Joshua Coursey, chairman of the Muley Fanatic Chapter of the Mule Deer Foundation. "This is an untapped area that's sacred to us and once you make an impact on it, the habitat never recovers."

Little Mountain is also special to many of the 650 members of the United Steelworkers Local 13214 who hunt and fish in the area, according to Monte Morlock, the local union president.

"There are plenty of other places in this state where they already have leases to drill," Morlock said. "Little Mountain is a pristine and fragile area and its habitat needs to be protected."

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Greater Little Mountain Coalition is a group of organizations and concerned individuals who want to see the greater Little Mountain area's rugged landscape continue to support abundant wildlife populations, coldwater fisheries and sensitive species while providing ample recreation opportunities. Coalition includes: Bowhunters of Wyoming; Local Western Wyoming Mule Deer Foundation; Mule Deer Foundation – Muley Fanatic Chapter; National Wildlife Federation; Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development; Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership; Trout Unlimited; United SteelWorkers Local 13214; and Wyoming Wildlife Federation.

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