



OIL AND GAS LEASING IN SOUTHWESTERN MONTANA

From Big Timber and Livingston to Lima and Dillon, up to Twin Bridges and Wisdom, there's a renewed interest in what lays beneath some of Montana's most fertile wildlife habitat. In southwestern Montana oil and gas leasing of state lands has exploded in the last six months due in large part to speculation. While exploration and leasing in the past have occurred in this pastoral part of Montana, the threat today is to open up some crucial wildlife habitats to industrialization with little planning.

While the current statistic of 1.3% of all state lands leased being developed is often thrown about freely, that does not take into consideration the current energy crisis and the overwhelming desire to get as much land as possible locked up before administrations and energy policies change in our nation's capitol. MWF is working to make sure that any development in southwestern Montana is done in balance with the amazing fish and wildlife resource that hunters, anglers, landowners and wildlife enthusiasts have worked so hard to restore. There are places where development can take place; there are places where development should not occur.

MWF does not consider the filing of a leasing protest lightly. The only time we protest is when the resource is truly at risk, or when the current level of mitigation requirements does not sufficiently ensure the long term viability of wildlife and the habitats necessary to sustain them. In some cases MWF will instead suggest that stipulations be put in place so that development can occur in a responsible manner.

While the leasing of state minerals itself does not mean that those leases will be developed, it does mean that the right to develop has been conveyed to the companies that purchase the lease. To that end, MWF has some serious concerns about the kind of stipulations that have been placed on parcels not only at the confluence of the Beaverhead and Ruby Rivers, but in the Centennial Valley and Lima areas. Development could have long-term impacts to water quality, fisheries, riparian areas and more. Again, in some places, development should simply not occur.

The Shields and Middle Yellowstone Valleys are receiving an enormous amount of attention from companies such as Devon Petroleum out of Oklahoma. In a recent article in the Livingston Enterprise, a Devon official was quoted as saying "Lets hope Livingston is ready for the Wildcatters." Given the way that the populations of southwestern Wyoming have grown, along with the associated drug and wildlife problems, we certainly hope so as well.

MWF will continue to work with the DNRC and the State Land Board in an effort to increase mitigation requirements, and wildlife stipulations so that we can have both - development and sustainable wildlife, wildlife habitats, and public hunting and fishing opportunities.