

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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POWDER RIVER BASIN RESOURCE COUNCIL AND
WYOMING OUTDOOR COUNCIL JOIN TOGETHER TO PROTEST
49 OIL AND GAS LEASE PARCELS OFFERED FOR SALE BY
WYOMING BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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On January 27, 2000, Powder River Basin Resource Council (PRBRC) and Wyoming Outdoor Council (WOC) joined forces to block the competitive sale of 49 oil and gas leases offered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The sale is presently scheduled for February 1, 2000. PRBRC and WOC filed a formal protest with Wyoming BLM State Director Al Pierson, challenging that the oil and gas leases, all of which are located in Sheridan, Campbell and Johnson counties, cannot be sold by BLM before a comprehensive environmental impact analysis is prepared on the potentially devastating effects of coal bed methane (CBM) development and extraction. CBM drilling is the most likely type of gas exploration and development that will occur in these areas.

Donley Darnell, PRBRC Chair, stated, "It's absurd that BLM would lease these parcels, knowing full well that coal bed methane extraction will be the primary activity, without completing any analysis on the devastating impacts associated with CBM mining." Darnell added, "One of the major impacts is the CBM well water discharge - potentially millions of gallons of water per day in a project area - which depletes aquifers and threatens many private landowner's well levels." In that regard, Campbell County rancher and longtime PRBRC member Ed Swartz said, "Without water you might as well give 'em the ranch and that is not what I have worked all my life for. You must have water at reasonable depths in order to ranch and they are taking away not only my livelihood, but also my children's."

Tom Darin, WOC's Director of Public Lands and Resources, said the basis of the protest is that federal law requires a complete and thorough review of the environmental impacts before BLM can irretrievably commit public resources to oil and gas leasing. Darin stated, "There has been no chance for public comment or participation in discussing the likely impacts that CBM extraction will have on the environment and the citizens of Sheridan, Johnson and Campbell counties." Darin added, "CBM development in northeast Wyoming is a major issue. CBM extraction has serious and significant impacts on water quality, aquifer depletion and recharge, vegetation loss, and soil erosion. Even more frightening is the distinct possibility of spontaneous combustion leading to enormous underground fires, a phenomenon that has been well documented in other CBM extraction sites."

The protest, delivered to BLM prior to the proposed sale of the leases, challenges that the competitive sales are in violation of the Federal Land Policy Management Act of 1976 and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Both statutes require environmental analysis and the chance for meaningful public participation before BLM leases public land and resources for oil and gas exploration.

The Powder River Basin Resource Council is a grassroots organization of individuals and affiliate groups dedicated to good stewardship of Wyoming's natural resources.

The Wyoming Outdoor Council represents citizens who are concerned about Wyoming's quality of life, our communities and our environment.