



BLM NEWS RELEASE

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Bureau of Land Management

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BLM Plan Emphasizes Continued Oil Shale and Tar Sands Research, Demonstration and Development *Two RD&D leases issued for oil shale resources in Colorado*

Washington, D.C. – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) today published a proposed plan to promote research, demonstration and development (RD&D) of oil shale and tar sand resources on BLM-administered land in Colorado, Utah and Wyoming.

The final programmatic environmental impact statement (PEIS) and plan amendments would make nearly 700,000 acres in Colorado, Utah and Wyoming available for research and development of oil shale, and about 130,000 acres in Utah for activities related to tar sands.

Colorado BLM also signed two leases for RD&D oil shale proposals to encourage industry to develop and test technologies aimed at developing oil shale resources on a commercial scale. The leases will go into effect on December 1, 2012. The approved leases were awarded to ExxonMobil Exploration Company and Natural Soda Holdings, Inc., each of whom submitted proposals for the in-situ development of oil shale, on adjacent 160-acre parcels in Rio Blanco County near Meeker, Colorado.

“Today’s leases demonstrate our continued commitment to encouraging research and development that will help fill in some of the existing knowledge gaps when it comes to technology, water use and potential impacts of commercial-scale oil shale development,” said BLM Colorado State Director Helen Hankins. “To date, technological and economic conditions have not combined to support a sustained commercial oil shale industry, and this plan lays a strong foundation to explore oil shale’s potential.”

The final PEIS amends 10 resource management plans and identifies areas that will be made available for potential leasing, exploration, and development of oil shale and tar sands resources. The final PEIS applies the same criteria used in the draft PEIS to identify lands that will be made available for activities. Additional acreage identified in the final PEIS reflects BLM’s correction of the acreage identified in the draft PEIS as lands with wilderness characteristics in Wyoming, re-evaluation of some lands designated as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and refinements to management of Greater Sage-grouse habitat to reflect information from State Wildlife agencies.

Under the proposed BLM plan, Federal lands that would be open to oil shale development would first be available for RD&D leases. The BLM could issue a commercial lease after a lessee satisfies the conditions of its RD&D lease and meets all federal regulations for conversion to a commercial lease. The final PEIS also includes provisions for wildlife habitat conservation including Greater Sage-grouse habitat.

Oil shale is a fine-grained sedimentary rock containing kerogen; it should not be confused with “shale oil.” When extracted from the surrounding rock, kerogen can be processed using extremely high heat and pressure to yield petroleum-like liquid.

Tar sands are sedimentary rocks containing a heavy hydrocarbon compound called bitumen, which can be refined into oil. Unlike the oil sands deposits in Canada, oil is not currently produced from tar sands on a significant commercial level in the United States. U.S. tar sands are hydrocarbon wet, whereas the Canadian oil sands are water wet, meaning that U.S. tar sands would require different processing techniques.

New land allocation decisions made on the basis of the Final PEIS replace previous land allocation decisions made in 2008. Some western communities argued that the 2008 PEIS and Record of Decision would have prematurely allowed commercial leasing without proven viable technologies and without a clear understanding of impacts on scarce western water supplies. In response to those concerns and in settlement of litigation, the agency agreed to reconsider the 2008 land allocation decisions.

The lease related documents, plan of operations, map, and other details can be viewed on the White River Field Office website at: [http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/wrfo/Oil_Shale - Round 2.html](http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/wrfo/Oil_Shale_-_Round_2.html).

Publishing the Notice of Availability in the *Federal Register* of the Final PEIS initiates a 30-day protest period for the proposed plan amendment decisions. The period closes on December 10, 2012. Publication of the Notice of Availability also begins a 60-day period for Governor’s Consistency review which closes on January 9, 2013. For more information on the requirements for filing a valid protest click [here](#).

All protests, including the follow-up letter to emails or faxes, must be in writing and mailed to one of the following addresses:

Regular Mail:

Director (210)
Attn: Brenda Hudgens-Williams
P.O. Box 71383
Washington, D.C. 20024-1383

Overnight Mail:

Director (210)
Attn: Brenda Hudgens-Williams
20 M Street SE, Room 2134LM
Washington, D.C. 20003

To read the Final PEIS go to <http://ostseis.anl.gov/documents/peis2012/index.cfm>.

The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land – the most of any Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2011, recreational and other activities on BLM-managed land contributed more than \$130 billion to the U.S. economy and supported more than 600,000 American jobs. The Bureau is also one of a handful of agencies that collects more revenue than it spends. In FY 2012, nearly \$5.7 billion will be generated on lands managed by the BLM, which operates on a \$1.1 billion budget. The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on public lands.

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