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### **BLM Offers Additional Time for Comment on Oil Shale Study**

The Bureau of Land Management announced today that it will accept public comment on the Oil Shale-Tar Sands Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for an additional 30 days.

The agency received several requests for additional time for public comment on the document, which it began developing more than two years ago to meet requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Energy Policy Act of 2005. The 90-day public comment period that BLM planning regulations require for environmental impact statements closes today, March 20, 2008.

Local governments including the Cities of Rifle, Colo., and Grand Junction, Colo., the Town of Silt, Colo., and Eagle and Pitkin Counties as well as others wrote to request additional time to comment on the proposed allocation of BLM-managed lands for future oil shale or tar sands leasing.

“Offering an additional 30 days for interested citizens to comment is another in a series of actions we feel are important in working with States and local communities on developing federal oil shale resources while also meeting the direction Congress has provided,” said BLM Director James Caswell, “This includes revisions made last August to the PEIS work schedule and the document itself, which we made in response to comments from federal, state and local governments.”

In the Energy Policy Act of 2005, enacted in August of that year, Congress directed completion of an oil shale-tar sand PEIS “not later than 18 months after enactment.”

“While recognizing this unusually specific timetable, the Department of the Interior and the BLM also remain committed to working closely with the States and local governments to achieve a proper balance in land use allocation and environmental protection,” Caswell said. “The States of Utah, Colorado and Wyoming, along with a number of local governments have been working with us from the beginning as cooperating agencies to draft the PEIS. We look forward to continuing this relationship as we plan for responsible oil shale development and to further input from the public as well.”

Fourteen federal, state and local government agencies – including the States of Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming, and the City of Rifle, Colorado – have cooperating agency status in preparing the PEIS. Under Department of the Interior regulations, cooperating agencies participate in drafting NEPA documents and developing the alternatives presented for public comment. Prior to publication of the Draft PEIS, the BLM gave cooperating agencies an additional three weeks to review the document and begin preparing comments. Last August, the BLM substantially revised a preliminary draft of the oil shale-tar sands PEIS on the basis of input from cooperating agencies.

There is no existing program for leasing federal oil shale resources, which are estimated at more than 50 times the country's proven conventional oil reserves and nearly five times the proven reserves of Saudi Arabia. Once finalized, the PEIS will guide future management of public lands containing oil shale and tar sands resources by identifying the BLM-managed lands for which the agency will consider oil shale lease applications. The PEIS will not authorize any leasing or commercial development of oil shale or tar sands projects. For lands that would be allocated (determined to be suitable) for oil shale development, the PEIS identifies constraints under which leasing would be allowed and that would end up as stipulations to leases.

Additional, site-specific NEPA analysis of lease applications and proposed plans of development will be required at the time individual proposals for allocated lands are submitted. These analyses will be completed with full public involvement, Caswell noted.

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