

For Immediate Release
December 20, 2007
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Contact
Heather Feeney, (202) 452-5031

Draft Environmental Study Addresses Oil Shale Resources on Public Lands

In response to congressional direction in the Energy Policy Act of 2005, the Bureau of Land Management today announced publication of the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) to guide future management of public lands containing oil shale and tar sands resources. Under the proposal in the Draft PEIS, the BLM would amend land use plans to allocate approximately 1.9 million acres of public lands in Utah, Colorado and Wyoming for potential commercial oil shale development.

The BLM is developing the PEIS pursuant to direction in Section 369(d) of the Energy Policy Act of 2005. The Act declares oil shale and other unconventional fuels to be strategically important domestic energy sources that should be developed to reduce the Nation's growing dependence on imported oil.

"The potential of America's oil shale resources to meet future U.S. demand for fuel is significant," said BLM Director Jim Caswell. "Oil shale deposits on public lands hold the equivalent of 1.23 trillion barrels of oil. The lands we are proposing to make available are estimated to hold, at a minimum, the equivalent of 61 billion barrels. At the low end of the range, that would yield enough gasoline to keep American tanks filled for 18 years."

Most U.S. oil shale resources are found in the Green River Formation of Colorado, Utah and Wyoming. The federally owned portion of this resource is more than 50 times the country's proven conventional oil reserves and nearly five times the proven reserves of Saudi Arabia.

Because there is no existing program for leasing these federal resources, the BLM is taking a thoughtful, deliberate approach to completing the PEIS. In cooperation with 14 federal, state and local government agencies, the BLM has been engaged in developing the Draft PEIS for nearly two years.

Caswell noted that the PEIS will not authorize any commercial development projects, provide for any leases to be issued, or commit the BLM to any particular course of action in the future. "The action proposed in the Draft responds to concerns expressed by the States and local communities serving as cooperating agencies," he said. "With their help, we've developed a proposal that will allow development of this vital asset while protecting other resources found on these lands and minimizing the impacts on local communities."

Between 305,000 and 1.5 million acres of BLM-managed lands would be excluded from oil shale leasing under the alternatives presented in the Draft PEIS. No leasing would be

allowed in Wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, other units of the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System, or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern that are closed to mineral development, among other areas. The PEIS anticipates that oil shale resources on identified lands would be leased as a solid mineral, and additional site-specific NEPA analysis would be completed on each application before any lease could be issued.

The document released today is a Draft document. Publication of a Notice of Availability in Friday's *Federal Register* begins the 90-day public comment period called for in BLM's planning regulations. "The BLM welcomes anyone with an interest in oil shale development to review and comment on the Draft PEIS during the next 90 days," Caswell said. "Full public involvement is critical throughout the process and helps ensure that decisions about oil shale development not only protect the environment but also serve the Nation's energy needs and support local communities and economies."

The complete Draft PEIS is available in electronic form (PDF) on the project website, <http://ostseis.anl.gov>, beginning today. Beginning tomorrow, paper and CD-ROM copies of the Draft will also be available at the BLM State Offices in Colorado, Utah and Wyoming; and BLM Field Offices in Vernal, Price, Richfield and Monticello, Utah; Meeker, Glenwood Springs and Grand Junction, Colorado; and Kemmerer, Rawlins and Rock Springs, Wyoming. The website will be enabled to take comments electronically beginning Friday, and written comments may be mailed to: BLM Oil Shale and Tar Sands Resources Draft Programmatic EIS Comments, 9700 South Cass Avenue, Argonne IL 60439.

The BLM previously issued six 160-acre leases for oil shale projects on public lands in Colorado and Utah under its research development and demonstration (RD&D) program. Information available from these projects is included in the PEIS and was considered during development of the alternatives presented in the Draft. For additional information on the BLM's efforts to develop federal oil shale and tar sands resources, visit http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/energy/oilshale_2.html.