

Thank you for your comment, Mike Braaten.

The comment tracking number that has been assigned to your comment is OST2012D50110.

Comment Date: April 23, 2012 13:28:40PM
OSTS 2012 Draft PEIS
Comment ID: OST2012D50110

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Comment Submitted:

The City Council of the City of Rifle greatly appreciates the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management's review of past decisions regarding oil shale leasing and development and offers the following comments:

The City of Rifle, Colorado (population 9,500) sits at the base of the oil-shale rich Roan Plateau in the Piceance Basin. When commercial development of oil shale occurs, our community and region will again be the likely epicenter of oil shale development as it was in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Unfortunately, in 1982, our community was also the epicenter of the oil shale bust that resulted in an economic depression in our region that spanned close to two decades.

In recent years our community and region was heavily impacted by natural gas exploration and production occurring in nearby private and public lands. Natural gas development brought significant growth to our community and placed considerable demands upon our municipal infrastructure, resulted in a shortage of affordable housing and essential community workforce, caused material and labor costs to skyrocket and strained social services and law enforcement capacities. Full-blown commercial development of oil shale may have similar impacts to our community and region.

Although we are supportive of the current Oil Shale research and development activities, given oil shale's history in our region, the City wants to ensure that we understand the impacts that may result from commercial production and from each company's technologies on our community and region. Such questions as: What will development mean for our economy – both positive and negative aspects? How much water will be used, for what, and how will local watersheds be affected? How will our infrastructure, community services and facilities be impacted, including roads, water, sewer, housing, law enforcement, etc.? How will production activities be powered? How will the environment and wildlife be affected? What will be the impacts relating to hunting, fishing and recreation in the oil shale development areas? Often we hear anecdotal responses to these questions, but like the industry, we need factual data on which to base our planning and infrastructure investment decisions.

We want to ensure that communities expected to be impacted by commercial development of oil shale have the appropriate and necessary financial resources to address and cope with the effects of production. Our community has learned from past energy development "booms" that investment in community services, facilities, and infrastructure is needed many years in advance of commercial production and the associated tax revenue. Additionally, as municipalities and counties in Colorado have experienced in recent years, energy tax revenues that have historically flowed to local governments to respond to energy development impacts have been usurped by the State Legislature to balance their budget in this down economy.

As in past comments on Oil Shale Development, the Rifle City Council strongly supports action by the federal government to develop an oil shale cumulative community impacts study for the anticipated commercial production regions and dedicate funding to address the identified local impacts prior to approval of commercial production. Additionally, the federal government should develop an incentive program for oil shale companies to provide meaningful up-front and on-going investment in local communities and to local governments directly affected by oil shale development and production.

Instead of selecting one of the alternatives put forward by BLM, the Rifle City Council requests that whatever alternative selected requires RD&D first. Additionally, we implore Secretary Salazar, BLM officials and our Congressmen and Senators to address the above mentioned issues through the federal regulatory or legislative processes to ensure that our community and region are prepared and have the necessary assistance in place prior to the commercial development of oil shale.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. Respectfully submitted on behalf of the City Council of the City of Rifle, Colorado.