Thank you for your comment, Michael Owsley.

The comment tracking number that has been assigned to your comment is OSTS2012D50147.

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Attachment: BLM Tar Sands 4.25.12.pdf

Comment Submitted:

Attached is a letter from the Pitkin County Board of Commissioners.

PITKIN COUNTY

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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April 25, 2012

Sherri Thompson
Oil Shale/Tar Sands PEIS Project Manager
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To Whom it May Concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the *Draft Oil Shale and Tar Sands Resources Programmatic EIS*. Our comments are focused on oil shale development and research, as that is the resource that is predominantly present in Colorado.

Pitkin County appreciates the fact that the Draft EIS incorporates an Alternative that responds directly to scoping comments we submitted in June, 2011. Specifically, Alternative 3 reflects our recommendation that an alternative be developed that *limits leasing of public lands to existing research leases until such time as functional technology has been developed to the extent that true impacts may be accurately assessed in a NEPA process.*

The draft PEIS acknowledges that overall, "the current experimental state of the oil shale and tar sands industries does not allow this PEIS to include sufficient specific information or cumulative impact analysis to support future leasing decisions within these allocated lands."[1] We concur that more information must be obtained about the technological requirements for development of the oil shale resource, as well as associated environmental, cultural and economic implications, before committing any more public lands to broad scale commercial oil shale development.

While we recognize that demand for fossil fuels is directly related to consumption, and that there is a need to produce oil and natural gas domestically as a matter of national security and the health of our economy, we don't believe that energy resource development should be at the expense of irreplaceable natural resources like clean air, clean water and an adequate water supply. Furthermore, new and existing energy development must be considered and analyzed in the context of cumulative impacts to wildlife habitat, human health, local economies and social cost/benefit. Based on the nascent character of the technology for development of oil shale and lack of definitive research and conclusions regarding cumulative impacts associated with development, we strongly recommend that the BLM adopt Alternative 3 in the Final PEIS. Alternative 3 will help to ensure that commercial development will not be initiated until a full understanding and evaluation of impacts is completed to a specified standard.

[1] 2012 Draft PEIS for Allocation of Oil Shale & Tar Sands Resources, at 1-2

Furthermore, we recommend that the Final PEIS provide direction that result in oil shale lessees evaluating/addressing the following issues in subsequent NEPA analysis:

Water Quality and Quantity Oil shale production will likely utilize vast amounts of water from the Colorado River basin which is life-sustaining for all of the Colorado River Compact states; providing water for drinking by humans, livestock and wildlife, for irrigating agricultural lands and for outdoor recreation; all of which are critical to a resort economy upon which Colorado and particularly rural mountain communities depend. To assess oil shale production impacts to water quality and quantity, the Final PEIS should require that subsequent NEPA analysis determine the following:

1. Quantity of water required for production annually; and resulting impacts to the health and livelihood of other downstream and junior users; Impacts to fisheries (including Colorado River Cutthroat Trout fisheries), riparian and wetland areas and wildlife resulting from potential changes to stream and river flows;
2. Level of toxins including but not limited to hydrocarbons, salts, trace metals that may be released and/or leached into streams, fisheries and groundwater as a result of production; and resulting impacts to fisheries, riparian and wetland areas and wildlife; and whether technologies are presently available to prevent salt loading and the introduction of other contaminants into ~~the C~~olorado River;
3. Secondary impacts of large scale oil shale development (such as population growth; and use of power generation to extract oil from shale) on demand for limited water resources in the West;
4. Impacts to recharge of deep-water aquifers in the event that in-situ extraction techniques result in new areas of porous rock that function as shallow aquifers.

While we support BLM's coordinated work with the U.S. Geologic Survey to analyze baseline water conditions in areas where oil shale might be developed, we believe that it is premature to lease lands for such development before the impacts to water are determined.

Wildlife In addition to potential impacts to fisheries and streams that sustain all species of wildlife, the roads, pipelines compressors, tanks, drill rigs and general infrastructure associated with oil shale extraction and production will most likely result in overall loss of habitat and fragmentation of contiguous wildlands necessary to sustain wildlife. The cumulative impact of resource development infrastructure on habitat and wildlands contiguity must be evaluated.

Air Quality Evaluate the impacts associated with the following aspects of oil shale production as it relates to air quality:

1. Health and climate change impacts of dust created as a result of surface mining and associated truck traffic on roads; impacts of dust on snow as it relates to resort economies that rely upon snow for recreation-based tourism;
2. Health and climate change impacts associated with power plant activity required for resource production; including but not limited to increases in ozone and nitrogen deposition;
3. Impaired visibility on a regional level; and resulting impacts to tourism as one consideration;

Overall Human Health Impact Evaluate all health issues and potential mitigations. Incorporate a health impact assessment which is a systematic, comprehensive methodology for assessing human health impacts.

Local Economy As a headwater area, Pitkin County has been diligent at a local, regional and State level, in protecting watersheds as a means of maintaining water quality and quantity to sustain wildlife, agriculture and our tourist economy. Rural resort communities such as ours and throughout the West are dependent upon the economic benefits of tourism, which is to a great extent reliant upon characteristics associated with clean water, clean air, healthy, intact ecosystems and vital wildlife populations on public lands. Additional NEPA analysis must weigh the impacts of oil shale development on rural and tourist-based economies against the economic benefits accrued to industry.

Social Cost/Benefit Finally, as a general matter in ultimately determining whether or not leases for commercial production of oil shale is appropriate, BLM should consider whether the amount of energy spent in oil shale production, as it compares to the amount of energy produced, is worth the potential impact to public health and public lands in the form of air and water quality, the overall health of ecosystems and wildlife populations; and tourism dependent economies of rural western Colorado. Also consider to what extent the production of oil shale will prolong our ability to use fossil fuels, and whether the impacts associated with the extended timeframe are at a reasonable cost. In the event that public lands in western Colorado are to be sacrificed to produce domestic fuels, it would be prudent to stipulate that such fuels be used domestically, rather than sold on the world-wide market. Finally, as there is clearly a finite supply of fossil fuels, it is critical to ensure that the use of public lands for domestic fossil fuel production be tied to concurrent fuel consumption conservation measures – and that oil shale leasing, if found to be viable, is ultimately part of a long term energy outlook and economy that also incorporates renewable energy resources.

In closing, we emphatically endorse Alternative 3, as this is the only Alternative that ensures that no additional public land will be available for leasing of any kind until and unless technology for resource development and associated development impacts can be assessed and a determination made, that environmental impacts can be eliminated. Furthermore, we recommend that the Final PEIS require subsequent public review of standards that may be developed for commercial leasing as the direct result of data assessed from RD&D projects – prior to issuance of any commercial leases. We cannot stress enough our concern about potential impacts of oil shale development on air quality and implications for climate change, and ramifications of oil shale development on water availability that is already severely restricted in western states.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments. Please direct any questions to Ellen Sassano at 970-920-5098 or at ellens@co.pitkin.co.us

Sincerely,

PITKIN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Michael M. Owsley

Michael M. Owsley, Chairman