

PXP accepting offers for Noble Basin leases

Trout Unlimited said it tried to buy the leases years ago, but the price was too high.

By Cory Hatch

Officials with an energy company that plans to develop 136 wells in the Noble Basin area of the Wyoming Range say they would consider offers for a lease buyout, provided the price is right.

Plains Exploration and Production Company is committed to developing the basin, spokesman Scott Winters said in an e-mail.

"PXP is confident that the leases can be developed in a manner that minimizes the impact to the area," he said.

But, Winters said, a lease buyout is an option.

"We will review all serious market-based offers," he said. "PXP has not received a formal offer to purchase its leases but will respond to any market-based offers that are presented."

Environmental groups say a lease buyout may be the only way to save the land from development. U.S. Forest Service officials say Plains Exploration has a legal right to develop the land.

"The only other option that preserves Noble Basin is the 'no action' alternative," Dan Smitherman, spokesman for Citizens for the Wyoming Range, said. "And the 'no action' alternative only tells PXP they need to go back to the drawing board. The only way that you permanently protect Noble Basin is with a lease buyout."

"My group has had no formal invitation to negotiate a lease buyout from PXP, but we would welcome that opportunity," Smitherman said. "We understand that when that opportunity comes, we have to be prepared. We are looking at sources of funding."

Trout Unlimited continues to support the concept of a lease buyout, Steven Brutger, Trout Unlimited Wyoming energy coordinator, said.

"We've been engaged with this for a

long time," he said. "Several years ago, Trout Unlimited informally approached them. It was apparent that we were so far apart in terms of what it would take, we weren't able to go any further."

"You need a willing seller and a willing buyer," Brutger said. "It would cost a lot of money."

Trout Unlimited is seeking a balanced solution, Brutger said.

"The fish and wildlife habitat in that area is critical," he said. "That's our primary concern. At the same time, we recognize that they have valid rights to develop those leases, if they can do so in a way that doesn't jeopardize that habitat. We're going to work with the operator ... and the Forest Service to try to find a good solution."

After several recent public meetings, people in northwest Wyoming seem passionate about protecting Noble Basin, Smitherman said.

"I was kind of blown away by the intensity of the feelings regarding this project," he said. "I think the whole [draft environmental] document is flawed. It's going to help our case."

The plan, proposed by Plains Exploration and Production Company, calls for the upgrade of 14 miles of existing roads, the construction of nearly 15 miles of new roads, 136 wells from 17 drill pads and the construction of gas and liquids gathering lines and facilities. The area is expected to be in production for more than 30 years.

Development would occur in two phases: an exploratory phase with the construction of three wells on one well pad over the course of two years, with 15 miles of roads on public land; and a development phase with the remaining 133 wells constructed on 16 well pads.

People can mail comments to Bridger-Teton National Forest Supervisor Jacqueline Buchanan, P.O. Box 1888, Jackson, WY 83001. Send electronic comments to comments-intermt-bridger-teton-big-piney@fs.fed.us with the subject line "Eagle Prospect and Noble Basin MDP DEIS." The plan is available at www.fs.fed.us/r4/btnf/projects/. Comments are due March 10.

COUNTY

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construction manager-at-risk for its addition and renovation project.

The deadline for applications is Feb. 18. Requests for qualifications packets are available by contacting library facility manager Dail Barbour at 733-2164, ext. 121, or dbarbour@tclib.org.

According to a news release, the construction manager-at-risk process allows the library to first evaluate bidders' qualifications as well as costs.

In other Wyoming counties where the process has been used, "a much more collaborative partnership between the organization and contractor has resulted," Barbour said in a statement.

The library will be the first government agency in Teton County to use the process.

"One of the parts I like best about this process is that it allows the library to bring on a general contractor earlier in the project than is typical," Deb Adams, library director, said in a statement. "This will help build a better partnership for developing the construction drawings and project costs."

A hiring recommendation will be made to the Teton County Library Board in March.

Last August, voters awarded the library \$8.5 million in specific purpose excise tax funds to pay for the project, which includes building an 11,000-square-foot addition and renovating the existing 24,000-square-foot building, parking lot and outdoor areas.

The library plans to begin site work this summer and expects to complete the project in approximately 18 months.

— Cara Rank



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