



NEWS RELEASE

US DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR ■ BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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BLM Releases Supplement to Proposed Resource Management Plan Amendment to Close Oil and Gas Leasing in Falcon Habitat

Santa Fe – The Bureau of Land Management has issued a supplement to its Proposed Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA) for fluid mineral leasing in Otero and Sierra Counties, which proposes to close Federal fluid mineral leasing on 35,790 acres in the Nutt and Otero Mesa desert grasslands to protect potential habitat for the Aplomado falcon.

In the Proposed RMPA, three areas were to be withheld from leasing for 5 years until the impacts of nearby drilling activity within the grasslands could be analyzed. The supplement proposes to permanently close these areas and provides further explanation of protective measures in the proposed action alternative in the RMPA; it also explains changes made from the draft proposal to the final proposal.

“It’s our hope that the additional information in the supplement will provide the public with a better understanding of our proposed RMP Amendment,” said Linda S.C. Rundell, State Director of the BLM in Santa Fe. “BLM has developed one of the most restrictive plans ever written for mineral leasing on public lands. It will protect sensitive natural resources in the two-county area, including Otero Mesa, while allowing a limited amount of oil and gas exploration and development to proceed.”

The supplement is available online at www.nm.blm.gov.

BLM’s Las Cruces Field Office mailed the supplement to the public earlier this week. The BLM will provide a 30-day comment period on the supplement starting May 28, 2004. All comments must be in writing and mailed to the following address by June 28, 2004:

Regular Mail:
State Director
Supplement Comments
Bureau of Land Management
P.O. Box 27115
Santa Fe, NM 87502-0115

Overnight Mail:
State Director
Supplement Comments
Bureau of Land Management
1474 Rodeo Road
Santa Fe, NM 87505



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Written comments will be fully considered as a part of the BLM's final decision-making process. A Record of Decision will be available to the public and mailed to interested parties this summer.

The BLM's proposed RMPA, released at the end of December 2003, took over 5 years to develop. Before the planning effort was begun, virtually all public lands in the two counties were open for leasing. BLM put a halt to new leasing until a plan amendment was developed.

BLM's Reasonable Foreseeable Development analysis projects that only 140 wells could be drilled in the two-county area, with up to 84 producing wells. BLM proposes that operators limit surface disturbing activities for new leases within grassland areas to no more than 5 percent of the leasehold at any one time. Disturbed areas (e.g., well sites, roads and pipelines) would have to be fully revegetated with mature native grasses and forbs before new areas could be disturbed. In addition, no activity will be allowed until leaseholders form or join Exploratory Units.

"A unique feature of unitization is that it requires greater planning and coordination of development on the part of the oil and gas industry," Rundell added. "This would result in less surface disturbance because BLM would be working with one unit operator rather than many lease holders. We will therefore be able avoid disturbance that comes from duplication of wells, pipelines, and roads."

The 5 percent stipulation would apply to about 105,000 acres within Otero Mesa, plus another 16,000 acres within the Nutt Grassland area in Sierra County. On March 8, Governor Richardson provided BLM a 50-page consistency review opposing the BLM's preferred alternative in the RMPA.

"The BLM is convinced that its Proposed Resource Management Plan Amendment is consistent with State resource plans, policies and procedures," Rundell added.

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