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Sportsmen and Conservation Groups Join Fight to Save Otero Mesa's Water & Wildlife Resources From Irresponsible Giveaway to Big Industry

Federal Government Must Listen to Local Interests, Groups Say

Sportsmen and Conservation groups, represented by Earthjustice, filed a lawsuit today in federal district court in Albuquerque seeking to save New Mexico's Otero Mesa from the onslaught of oil and gas development. The conservation groups' lawsuit supports a similar legal challenge to the oil and gas development plans filed in April by the State of New Mexico. Today's suit claims the federal government failed to disclose the true effects of the oil and gas development on water resources, wildlife and archaeological sites, in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act. The suit also contends that the development plan fails to protect wildlife and plants in the most environmentally sensitive areas.

On April 22, New Mexico Attorney General Patricia Madrid filed suit on behalf of New Mexico against the federal Bureau of Land Management in federal district court in Santa Fe. New Mexico governor Bill Richardson has repeatedly asked the federal government to consider state interests and scale back the oil and gas development plans at Otero Mesa. The New Mexico lawsuit says that BLM violated federal laws by refusing to consider state interests when it adopted its aggressive oil and gas development scheme.

The federal Bureau of Land Management is authorizing the opening of more than 90 percent of public lands under its jurisdiction in the area between El Paso, TX and Carlsbad, NM to oil and gas drilling. The area contains vast stretches of Chihuahuan desert grasslands, one of the most endangered ecosystems in the world.

"The Bush Administration ignored us and ignored the law in their rush to give away Otero Mesa to energy executives," said Oscar Simpson, president of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation. "So along with the State of New Mexico, we are going to court and we are going to win. We will not sacrifice our water or wildlife resources in order to line the pockets of a few energy executives. Sportsmen don't understand why the Bush administration won't promote energy development that protects our freshwater aquifers and has minimal impact on big game and other wildlife that hunters cherish and depend on."

The New Mexico Wildlife Federation is a sportsmen's conservation organization that was founded in 1914 in Silver City by Aldo Leopold and several other prominent sportsmen – conservationists.

"The oil and gas development planned for Otero Mesa will likely destroy the underground water supply across southern New Mexico," said Earthjustice attorney Mike Harris. "In this part of the world, water is the very life blood of the local people."

The groups filing the suit include the National Wildlife Federation, New Mexico Wildlife Federation, New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, Southwest Environmental Center, The Wilderness Society, Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and Forest Guardians.

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