



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8

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Ref: 8P-AR

Mr. R. Perry Walker
Post Office Box 224
Daniel, Wyoming 83115

SEP 12 2007

Dear Mr. Walker:

Thank you for your letter of May 6, 2007, with its attached "Petition from the Citizens of Sublette County, Wyoming." We appreciate both the concerns expressed and the willingness of the petitioners to bring your concerns to our attention.

The petition lists concerns about the effects of gas field development in the Jonah and Pinedale Anticline Development (JPAD) Area on air quality in Sublette County. While we share some of the concerns expressed in the petition, we disagree with some of the specific issues that are raised. As indicated in our April 6, 2007, letter on the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Pinedale Anticline Oil and Gas Exploration Development Project, US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is concerned, as you are, about impacts on air quality in the upper Green River basin and in the western United States. And we agree that state and federal regulators must carry out the Clean Air Act even as the demand for energy continues and resources in this region are developed.

We share your disappointment that estimated emissions in the Pinedale Anticline area increased several-fold between 2000, when the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) wrote its Record of Decision (ROD) for the area, and 2006. However, while this occurrence raises questions about the original projections, we do not agree with your statement about dispersion modeling. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to estimate the potential effects of reasonably foreseeable future development on the environment. We know of no substitute for dispersion modeling to predict the future effects of emissions into the air. The problem with the original projections was that the rate of development was underestimated. BLM has quantified and proposed to mitigate those increases in the current EIS. EPA continues to work with BLM, the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, Air Quality Division; and the US Department of Agriculture Forest Service toward this end.

With regard to your concerns expressed about visibility impacts estimated by modeling, EPA supports comparing modeled results to *natural background conditions* as evidenced in our comments on the visibility analysis conducted by BLM for the Pinedale Anticline Oil and Gas Exploration and Development Project. For example, we noted that BLM's modeling for 2005 showed 45 days per year of visibility change greater than the 1.0 deciview threshold at the Bridger Wilderness Area, relative to natural background. We considered the comparisons of visibility to natural background conditions that BLM disclosed in the current EIS. We do not support using visibility conditions in 2005 as a reference or background level, nor does the current DEIS use 2005 data as reference or background data.

In addition to energy development in the immediate area, cumulative sources of air pollution, including sources beyond Wyoming's borders, may contribute to the degradation of regional visibility. The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, Air Quality Division, is aware of its responsibility under the Clean Air Act and will be submitting a regional haze State Implementation Plan (SIP) to EPA including an analysis of regional sources. Ultimately, the goal of the regional haze SIP will be to achieve visibility representative of natural background conditions and not conditions in 2005.

As suggested in the petition, local conditions vary and states may adopt regulations and guidance that are more stringent than those established by EPA. The Air Quality Division is the primary agency regulating air quality in Wyoming. In revisions made as recently as June 2007, the Air Quality Division has established state-specific permitting guidance for oil and gas production facilities. Because of concerns about regional air quality, the guidance includes provisions that apply specifically to the JPAD Area. EPA supports the Air Quality Division's continuing efforts to regulate emissions in the JPAD Area in order to preserve air quality and protect visibility in nearby pristine areas.

The final paragraph of the petition reads: "State and Federal regulators must direct BLM to slow the rate of gas field development until emissions reduction technology can catch up. To date, industry has implemented only limited reduction methods while pressing for accelerated rates of drilling." The DEIS states that reducing the pace of development may be used as a mitigation tool if other means fail to mitigate the modeled impacts. In our comments on the DEIS, we identified the importance of this option. And, while BLM is the lead agency with the authority and responsibility to issue the Record of Decision with associated mitigation requirements, EPA will continue to work with the State of Wyoming and BLM as this project goes forward to ensure that visibility impacts are eliminated.

Again, thank you for your letter and petition. We will continue to work within the NEPA and Clean Air Act processes to protect the environment.

Sincerely,

Robert E. Roberts
Regional Administrator

cc: Governor Dave Freudenthal
The Honorable Senator John Barrasso
The Honorable Senator Mike Enzi
Representative Barbara Cubin
Robert Bennett
John Corra
Chuck Otto

