



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex
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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE RELEASES DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION ON BACA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Public Meeting Regarding the Environmental Assessment To Be Held on January 26, 2011.

Public Comments Accepted Until February 7, 2011.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announces the availability of a draft environmental assessment of proposed exploration of potential oil and gas resources underlying the Baca National Wildlife Refuge. This document is available for public review and comments will be accepted until February 7, 2011.

The document describes a project proposed by Lexam Explorations (U.S.A.) Inc. to conduct initial exploration of mineral interests under Baca National Wildlife Refuge. The environmental assessment analyzes alternatives that seek to protect Refuge resources while honoring a mineral owner's legally vested right to access and explore.

This new analysis is the product of a settlement agreement between the parties in a 2007 lawsuit filed by the San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council and the Citizens for San Luis Valley Water Protection Coalition against the Service challenging the Service's compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA is a United States environmental law that requires all Federal governmental agencies to consider the environmental impacts of any proposed federal actions and reasonable alternatives to those actions.

The end product of this analysis will be either an Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact or, if the federal action is determined to have a significant effect on the environment, an Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision.

In 2006 Lexam proposed drilling two exploratory wells on the Baca National Wildlife Refuge to assess the potential for marketable quantities of natural gas or oil. The current operating plan provided by Lexam for these exploration activities and the draft environmental assessment can be viewed at <http://www.fws.gov/alamosa/bacaNWR.html>.

The Service has also scheduled a public meeting on **Wednesday January 26 at 6:00 p.m. at the Colorado College Baca Campus Conference Center in Crestone, Colorado**. The meeting will be an informational open house with a presentation followed by a question-and-answer session. The public can provide written comments regarding the environmental assessment at this meeting.

Comments can also be sent via mail to David Lucas, Chief, Division of Refuge Planning, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Refuge Planning, P.O. Box 25484, Denver, CO 80225-0486 or via email to: **BacaDraftEAComments@fws.gov** and must be received no later than February 7, 2011.

The draft environmental assessment and the Lexam operating plan can be viewed or downloaded via the Refuge's website at <http://www.fws.gov/alamosa/bacaNWR.html> or obtained by contacting Mike Blenden, Project leader, at (719) 589-4021.

The Baca National Wildlife Refuge was authorized with passage of the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve Act of 2000. It was established in 2003 and expanded in 2004 with acquisition of the Baca Ranch. The legislated purpose of the refuge, in part, is to restore, enhance, and maintain wetland, upland, riparian, and other habitats for native wildlife, plant, and fish species in the San Luis Valley.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 97-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 548 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.