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## BLM defers leases in Wyo. wildlife corridor

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Federal officials have deferred or placed conditions on some southwest Wyoming lands slated to be sold to oil and gas producers this fall.

The Bureau of Land Management will postpone potential oil and gas development on nearly 5,000 acres in a key mule deer migration corridor. BLM struck a deal with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department to defer parcels where at least 90 percent of the land intersects with the corridor.

Parcels with less overlap will carry a special lease notice that the operator must coordinate with state and local officials to minimize wildlife impacts, in keeping with the Interior Department's **Secretarial Order 3362**.

"Some North American big game travel over a hundred miles on their migration routes every year, and more often than not, those routes traverse federal, state and private lands," Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke said in a statement today. "This is why it's important that the federal government work with the state to adjust management and development plans where necessary if they overlap migratory corridors or winter range."

BLM's Rock Springs Field Office is currently updating its Green River Resource Management Plan, which was finalized in 1997.

"This decision gives the public and those involved in the Rock Springs Resource Management Plan revision time to work on steps that balance wildlife needs with energy development needs," Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead (R) said in a statement. "Wyoming will continue to work with the Department of the Interior to strike that balance."

Interior officials met last week with Wyoming wildlife advocates who called on the agency to defer leases in the mule deer corridor and in a section of southwestern Wyoming known as the Greater Little Mountain area (*see map*). The groups presented concerns raised by Mead, county officials and local interests.

"Sharing the platter of support from the local, county and state levels with the national level provides continuity within the process," said Joy Bannon, field director for the Wyoming Wildlife Federation.

Josh Coursey, president and CEO of the Muley Fanatic Foundation, applauded BLM for postponing some of the Wyoming leases in the September sale. But he said they will be calling on BLM to take similar action on the Greater Little Mountain area's acreage that is slated for auction in December.

"It's definitely a start," Coursey said.

The Center for Biological Diversity said BLM should do more to protect the corridor.

"It defies credulity to characterize the deliberate sacrifice of southwest Wyoming as 'balance.' Zinke should not get credit for sparing a mere 5,000 acres of migration corridor from drill rigs when he's putting hundreds of thousands of acres on the auction block," said Michael Saul, a senior attorney

for the group. "The 'special lease notice' adds no meaningful limits on drillers' ability to disrupt mule deer migration paths and winter range. Mule deer migratory corridors will not be protected by this feeble PR maneuver."