

**Powder River Basin Resource Council
Wyoming Wildlife Federation
Wyoming Outdoor Council
National Wildlife Federation**

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For Immediate Release

Contact: Jill Morrison or Shannon Anderson – 307-672-5809

**BLM State Office Rules in Favor of Fortification Elk Herd
Buffalo Field Office Required to Take a Second Look at Impacts of CBM projects**

SHERIDAN - Late Yesterday, a coalition of landowner and wildlife organizations working to protect the wildlife and fragile resources of the Fortification area received four favorable decisions from the State BLM office. The appeals, filed before the BLM state director by the Powder River Basin Resource Council, Wyoming Wildlife Federation, Wyoming Outdoor Council and the National Wildlife Federation, challenged the impacts of CBM development on the world class Fortification elk herd and the fragile resources in this area.

Rancher Eric Barlow welcomed the decisions saying, “There is a lot interest in protecting the unique resources of this area from the Governor’s office to local landowners. It looks like the state BLM office is beginning to take notice that developing resources responsibly requires more than permitting.”

Buffalo based outfitter Pete Dube also hailed the decisions adding, “Fortification is one of those rugged, remote, scenic and very important wildlife areas that deserves special care and attention. In fact, it is an area that I believe is too special and fragile and I’m concerned whether it can even be developed in way where the damage to the wildlife and fragile resources can be mitigated.”

The state director appeals were filed on four CBM projects that were all permitted by the Buffalo Field office entirely within the Fortification Creek elk herd’s yearlong range from July through August. The CBM developments were: Lance’s August Unit Zeta project; Black Diamond’s Michelena project; Williams Carr Draw 3 West and Carr Draw V, Add 2 project.

The projects permitted a total of just under 250 CBM wells.

The BLM state director decision completely vacated the Michelena project decision acknowledging the group’s arguments that it was inside the Fortification special

planning area and could not be permitted ahead of the BLM's planning documents. A stay on development was granted on the Williams Carr Draw III West project, which was also challenged by the landowner, William Maycock. The BLM also required a stay on development of the Williams Carr Draw V, Add 2 until BLM rules on the merits of the issues raised in the appeal by the groups. The August Unit Zeta project was remanded to the Buffalo Field Office for further review on the cumulative impacts to the Fortification elk herd.

The BLM State Office decision agreed with the groups' arguments that the Buffalo Field Office cumulative impact analysis regarding the Fortification elk herd was inadequate by saying, "The cumulative effects analysis in the EA is not sufficient to inform the decisionmaker about the incremental impacts arising from the different alternatives given the past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions within the elk yearlong range."

Wildlife biologist, Larry Gerard, who recently retired last year after 30 years with the Buffalo BLM assisted the groups in their appeal and analysis of the BLM permitting. Gerard said, "I'm glad that BLM chose the right path and asked the Buffalo Office to do some additional environmental analysis of all of these projects. This up-front analysis is critical because if the projects proceed, it will be hard to reverse impacts or correct errors. The combined impacts to the elk will be significant if BLM allows the projects to proceed in a business-as-usual fashion and this extra period of environmental review gives the agency the chance to apply stronger measures that will protect this important herd."

"We are also pleased that BLM recognizes that it needs a fuller understanding of environmental impacts from coalbed methane development in the Fortification Creek area before it allows this development. We are hopeful that further analysis will lead BLM to require greater levels of environmental protection in this area, particularly for the entire elk yearlong habitat," said Bruce Pendery, Program Director at the Wyoming Outdoor Council.

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