

Devon Energy works to minimize impact to Little Mountain

By DAVID MARTIN, Green River Star

(This is the final segment of a three-part series exploring the issue of energy development near Little Mountain.)

When residents learned that energy development was spreading to Little Mountain, to say some were less than enthusiastic is an understatement.

Worries that a company would come in and develop an energy resource without a concern about wildlife and the surrounding countryside were on the minds of many residents.

However, a representative from Devon Energy, the company initiating exploratory drilling and seismic work in the area, said the company is working on a number of ways to minimize impact to the area.

“We do understand that this is a sensitive area for Sweetwater County residents,” Dru Bower-Moore said in a telephone interview Monday.

The company is using a variety of methods to reduce impacts on local wildlife and land.

One route the company is taking is by using a closed loop drilling system, which does not use a reserve pit filled with fluids and drill cuttings.

Bower-Moore said the closed loop system allows for less surface disruption and protects animals from potentially falling into the pit.

The system, which replaces a pit with tanks separating fluids and liquids, allows for fluid to recycle through the system as opposed to into a reserve pit, which could contaminate the watershed with toxic chemicals or allow hydrocarbons to seep into the soil.

Currently the company has one exploratory well in operation, drilling to a depth of 16,500 feet. A second well site has been staked in the northern portion of the Little Mountain area, but the road and well pad haven't been constructed yet. The depth that site will drill to is 10,000 feet.

A second way the company is minimizing impacts centers on how the company conducts seismic work in the area.

Bower-Moore said the company met with representatives of the Wyoming Governor's Office, Wyoming Game and Fish Office and other agencies to

discuss how to lessen the impact on wildlife.

To reduce the impact on migratory herds, Devon used only existing roads and trails to move equipment and moved from northeast to the southwest to not interfere with migration patterns.

To access areas unreachable through trails or roads, Devon either hand carried or delivered using helicopters to reduce land disturbance.

The company seismic project is also a more environmentally friendly method.

By using charges placed in the ground to scan what's beneath the land, Devon avoided using a more damaging vibrosis technique of seismic work.

Bower-Moore said vibrosis uses large trucks with seismic devices on them to scan and view the rock formations beneath an area.

She added the company is also extending its project over a two-year period to reduce impacts.

She described the costs associated with removing and remobilizing work crews as "significant," saying the company voluntarily cut its project days from 120 to 60 to accommodate hunters.

Devon completed half its seismic project and removed all of its equipment by Aug. 26.

Devon is targeting possible natural gas stores in the area, however, Bower-Moore stressed that the work Devon is doing at Little Mountain is exploratory.

"We don't know what's down there," she said.

She added if Devon does decide to develop the area, they will explore uses of directional and horizontal drilling techniques if the technology is feasible.

Directional and horizontal drilling isn't as disruptive to the environment as traditional methods because well pads can be spread over much larger distances, which decreases the frequency of drilling rigs being moved across an area.

Bower-Moore also said Devon would work with other governmental agencies to determine the best way to develop the natural resources at Little Mountain while limiting impacts to the land and wildlife.

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