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Forest Service sued

Environmental coalition cites policy on ANF drilling

By CHUCK HAYES chayes@timesobserver.com

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A coalition of environmental groups headed by former and current U.S. Forest Service employees has filed a lawsuit in federal court, claiming the Forest Service has failed to follow national environmental policy in dealing with oil and gas drilling on the Allegheny National Forest.

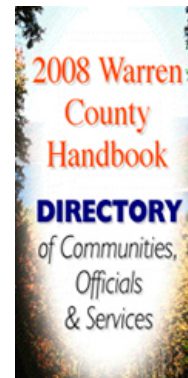
Specifically mentioned in the suit are proposed drilling projects in the Rimrock Recreation Area and Longhouse National Scenic Byway areas of the Allegheny National Forest.

The suit was filed in federal court in Erie on Thursday, according to Ryan Talbott, forest watch coordinator for the Allegheny Defense Project.

Talbott said the lead plaintiff in the suit against the Forest Service is the Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics.

Talbott described the FSEEE as a "whistle blowers" group of former and current Forest Service employees based in Eugene, Ore.

The "whistle blowers" group, said Talbott, may or may not include former or current Forest Service



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employees based on the Allegheny National Forest.

Joining the Allegheny Defense Project and Forest Service employees group in the federal suit is the Sierra Club.

The suit calls on the court to compel the Forest Service to follow the National Environmental Policy Act guidelines and allow the public to offer input before issuance of permits for oil and gas drilling projects on the national forest.

The suit states that the Forest Service recognizes that oil and gas drilling poses a serious threat to the area's wildlife, including the northern flying squirrel, eastern box turtle, wood turtle, timber rattlesnake, and several bird populations such as the northern goshawk, great blue heron and cerulean warbler.

"Despite this," the suit states, "the agency refuses to conduct the legally required environmental reviews that allow the public to weigh in on the drilling projects."

David Sublette of the Sierra Club's Pennsylvania chapter, said, "Drilling and new roads that accompany it are fragmenting wildlife habitat and destroying the wild character of our national forest. The Forest Service is blazing ahead with new oil and gas projects without even subjecting them to required environmental review or allowing citizens to comment on them."

Sublette said the Forest Service's actions are symptomatic of "the Bush administration's greasing the wheels for Big Oil without any regard for the impacts on America's remaining wildlife and scenic forests."

Bill Belitskus, president of the Allegheny Defense Project board, said the agency has a mandatory duty to protect the surface and water resources of the Allegheny National Forest.

"Over twelve thousand oil and gas wells have been drilled in the Allegheny without proper environmental analysis and public comment," said Belitskus. "Not one more well, pipeline, road, stone pit or tank farm should be constructed by private oil and gas companies until the Forest Service enforces all federal laws."

Forest Service personnel in Warren were not immediately available on Thursday for comment on the legal action.

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thinkaboutit

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 The Allegheny National Forest is not the same as many of the other national forests. In other National Forest the Forestry department leases the mineral rights out to private companies to drill. The Allegheny National Forest was purchased from private land owners after the discovery of oil. So when the federal government bought the property they did not buy the mineral rights. The private land owners retained the mineral rights giving them the right to still drill for oil and gas and mine for other minerals. The way that the laws are written concerning mineral rights: is that subsurface rights (mineral rights) have priority over surface rights. Just be glad that they have not found large deposits of coal in the Allegheny National Forest and started to strip mine it.

Milkman

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 The U.S. Forest Service and especially the leadership of the Allegheny National Forest are either incompetent, out of control or both.

The Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, The Allegheny Defense Project and the Sierra Club are to be commended for filing their suit. Hopefully saner minds in the courts will prevail.

Good luck in your efforts.

Jay123

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 Just how deep does John Peterson have his hands in the Oil Drillers pockets.

We NEED to convert to Clean Green energy. Wind, Solar, Hydrogen, Etc. This is where we need to invest in. Once we destroy the earth then what? Here is a good question for John Peterson Why is the Pipe Line in Alaska that was suppose to supply the US with oil being sold over seas and then



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