



---

## 5. OIL AND GAS: Enviro groups sue to force regulations on Allegheny exploration (12/04/2008)

**Katie Howell, *Land Letter* reporter**

Environmental groups have filed suit against the U.S. Forest Service to force the agency to conduct environmental reviews and collect public comments about potential oil and gas projects in Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania.

Oil and gas drilling in Allegheny National Forest has increased significantly from 100 new wells per year in the mid-1990s to nearly 1,500 new wells per year now. In addition, more than 2,000 miles of oil and gas roads have been built through the public space so companies can access their drilling sites, according to the Allegheny Defense Project, one of the plaintiffs in the [suit](#) filed late last month.

But the Forest Service has not conducted National Environmental Policy Act analyses on most of the drilling sites.

"The Forest Service has a mandatory duty to protect the surface and water resources of the Allegheny," said Bill Belitskus, board president for the Allegheny Defense Project, in a statement. "Over 12,000 oil and gas wells have been drilled in the Allegheny without proper environmental analysis and public comment. 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."

The suit was filed Nov. 20 in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania by the Allegheny Defense Project, Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics and the Sierra Club. It contends that the Forest Service should require environmental analysis and public comment for potential drilling sites prior to allowing companies onto the public land.

"This is not about denying the right to drill, just about having full disclosure and transparency," said Ryan Talbott, Forest Watch coordinator for the Allegheny Defense Project. "It's about making the best decisions for Pennsylvania's only national forest."

Last spring, the Allegheny Defense Project criticized the Forest Service's practice of not requiring NEPA analysis for oil and gas drilling within the forest on land with privately held mineral rights -- about 95 percent of the forest ([Land Letter](#), May 29). The group contended in a letter to the Forest Service that drilling on lands with privately held mineral rights in forests in Arkansas, Michigan and West Virginia were subject to NEPA regulations.

"[The Forest Service] has consistently asserted that NEPA does not apply to its 'Notices to Proceed' for oil and gas exploration and drilling on the Allegheny National Forest, even though other National Forests do conduct NEPA analysis prior to issuing Notices to Proceed," the environmental groups' complaint says.

Talbott said his group had not yet received any response about the suit from the Forest Service.

Joe Walsh, a spokesman for the Forest Service, said the agency would not comment on impending litigation.

"This is symptomatic of the Bush administration's policy of greasing the wheels for Big Oil without any regard for the impacts on America's remaining wildlife and scenic forests," said David Sublette of the Sierra Club Pennsylvania Chapter in a statement. "We want to ensure that the Forest Service is conducting the required environmental analysis for these projects and allowing the public to weigh in on them. Only then can we fully protect our wildlife and scenic lands."

[Click here](#) to read the lawsuit.

## LAND LETTER HEADLINES -- Thursday, December 4, 2008

---

### SPOTLIGHT

---

1. OIL AND GAS:  
Enviros to file protest over controversial Utah lease sale today

### THIS WEEK'S STORIES

---

2. NATURAL GAS:  
La., Interior wage war over lake's lucrative mineral rights
3. FORESTS:  
Thinning, carbon sequestration not at odds, studies suggest
4. OIL AND GAS:  
Enviro groups demand moratorium on new tar sands development in Canada
5. OIL AND GAS:  
Enviro groups sue to force regulations on Allegheny exploration
6. ABANDONED MINES:  
Water supply, fish stocks, recreation propel efforts to clean Colo.'s Peru Creek
7. WATER:  
Groups sue to halt all San Francisco-San Joaquin Delta diversions
8. CLIMATE CHANGE:  
Southwest's piñons in peril, scientists say
9. INVASIVE SPECIES:  
Discovery of zebra mussels in Md. waters triggers concerns
10. WIND POWER:  
Mont.-Alberta power line moves forward, landowners remain concerned
11. PUBLIC LANDS:  
BLM to modify emergency withdrawal authority
12. FORESTS:  
Calif. judge limits roadless rule to 10 states
13. MINING:  
EPA approves mountaintop removal rule changes
14. TRANSITION:  
Obama adds to Interior transition team
15. SHORT TAKES:  
Interior, Wetlands, Energy Corridors, Endangered Species, Oil and Gas, Border Fence

---

Advertisement



ClimateWire

ENVIRONMENT  
& ENERGY DAILY

Greenwire

 Land Letter

E&ENEWS PM

E&ETV

*The Premier Information Source for Professionals Who Track Environmental and Energy Policy.*

© 1996-2008 E&E Publishing, LLC [Privacy Policy](#) [Site Map](#)

---