

# **Oil and Gas Leasing EIS on Lands Administered by the Dixie National Forest**

## **NEPA PROCESS**

### **What is NEPA?**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 requires an environmental review of major federal actions that have the potential to significantly affect the quality of the environment. The purpose of NEPA is to ensure that environmental considerations are incorporated into Federal decision-making. The two primary objectives of NEPA are: (1) Agencies must have available and fully consider detailed information regarding environmental effects at the time a decision is made; and (2) Agencies must make the same information available to interested and/or affected persons, agencies, and organizations before decisions are made and before actions are taken. In some instances, in order to comply with NEPA, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must be prepared in order to analyze the environmental effects of a proposed project.

### **Why Does NEPA apply to this Proposal?**

The Dixie National Forest determined that implementation of oil/gas leasing and subsequent exploration and development activities could have a significant impact on the environment, requiring an EIS.

### **What are the NEPA Process Steps for this Project?**

- 1) The Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act of 1987 requires the Forest Service to evaluate National Forest System lands for potential oil and gas leasing. The Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) acts as the leasing agent for the Federal government. In compliance with this legislation, the Dixie National Forest is evaluating the potential for future oil and gas leasing on the Forest including reasonably foreseeable development scenarios for oil and gas exploration and production activities, which might occur as a consequence of the leasing decisions. The Dixie National Forest also proposes to amend the Forest Plan, if necessary, to incorporate the leasing decisions and other changes as indicated in the analysis.
- 2) The Dixie National Forest determined that the Proposed Action could have a significant impact on the environment, and an EIS must be prepared in order to comply with NEPA requirements. The BLM and the State of Utah will be cooperating agencies for this EIS.
- 3) The EIS process started in December 29, 2006 with publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register, notifications in local newspapers, and direct mailings to persons and agencies on an initial EIS mailing list. The NOI was published on December 29, 2006.
- 4) The publication of the NOI began a 30-day public scoping comment period during which open houses are being held in St. George, Cedar City, and Cannonville, Utah. The open houses will include displays explaining the project and a forum for commenting on the project.
- 5) Public scoping comments can be provided in person at one of the open houses or via US Mail or e-mail to Susan Baughman, Oil and Gas Leasing Project Manager, Dixie National Forest, 1789 N. Wedgewood Lane, Cedar City, Utah 84720; [dixie\\_oil\\_gas\\_eis\\_comments@fs.fed.us](mailto:dixie_oil_gas_eis_comments@fs.fed.us). Public comments should be sent by January 29, 2007 to be most useful.
- 6) This input will be used by the Agencies to develop a range of alternatives, issues, and indicators to be used in the EIS. A Scoping Summary Report will be prepared describing: the public scoping input, major issues to be evaluated in the analysis, alternatives considered, and alternatives to be evaluated in the EIS. This document will be made available to the public via posting on the Dixie National Forest website.

Persons who commented during scoping will be included on the EIS mailing list for future actions and notices.

- 7) The Agencies will evaluate potential environmental effects to a wide range of environmental and social resources. Effects will be identified for the individual components of the Proposed Action and all the alternatives. The cumulative effects of the Project, when combined with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions, will also be evaluated. Written descriptions of the Proposed Action and alternatives, required agency actions, baseline conditions, environmental impacts, mitigation measures to reduce impacts, and consultation and coordination efforts will be included in the Draft EIS. The Agencies estimate the Draft EIS will be completed late in 2007 or early in 2008, but this is subject to change.
- 8) A Notice of Availability (NOA) will be published in the Federal Register to begin a 45-day public comment period on the Draft EIS. Copies of the Draft EIS will be made available through direct mailings to the EIS mailing list and via posting on the Dixie National Forest website. The NOA will also be published in the *Spectrum* (St. George, Utah). During this period, a public meeting will be held on the Draft EIS in Cedar City, Utah.
- 9) The Agencies will review comments on the Draft EIS received from other agencies and the public during the comment period and prepare the Final EIS. The Agencies will incorporate substantive comments, changes, corrections, and revisions into the Final EIS. The Final EIS will identify the preferred alternative selected by the Agencies after consideration of all public input. The Agencies currently estimate the Final EIS will be completed in the summer of 2008, but this is subject to change.
- 10) Copies of the Final EIS will be made available via mailings and on the Internet. A 30-day public availability period will begin with publication of a NOA in the Federal Register and local newspapers. During the public availability period, the public can provide comments, if any, on the Final EIS.
- 11) The BLM and Dixie National Forest will prepare separate Records of Decision (RODs) related to future oil and gas leasing including any standard stipulations that would apply. The RODs will discuss the Agency Preferred Alternative, the Environmentally Preferable Alternative, and any stipulations developed during the analysis. The Agencies currently estimate the RODs will be completed in the summer of 2008, but this is subject to change.
- 12) The RODs will be made available through direct mailings and posting on the Dixie National Forest website. Separate appeal periods for the RODs will commence with publication of Notice of Decisions (NODs) of the RODs in the *Spectrum*. Members of the public aggrieved by the decisions in the RODs can file written appeal statements with the BLM and Dixie National Forest within the appeal periods described in the NODs. Consideration of any appeals will follow specific policies and procedures of the Agencies.
- 13) Following the close of the ROD appeal periods, and completion of any subsequent appeal processes, the Agencies will take actions as appropriate on their decisions. The earliest this would likely occur is summer of 2008, but this is subject to change.

## **How Can I Stay Involved?**

Attend a scoping meeting in your area. Be sure to add your name to the Project mailing list. Fill out a comment form and return it to the Dixie National Forest (instructions can be found on the comment form). Stay informed on the Dixie National Forest website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/dixie/>.

## **Who Can I Contact if I Have Any Questions?**

If you have any questions or need additional information, contact: Susan Baughman, Oil and Gas Leasing Project Manager, Dixie National Forest, 1789 N. Wedgewood Lane, Cedar City, Utah 84720, phone (435)-865-3703, Attn: Oil/Gas Leasing EIS. E-mail: [dixie\\_oil\\_gas\\_eis\\_comments@fs.fed.us](mailto:dixie_oil_gas_eis_comments@fs.fed.us).