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## Forest Service acts on leases

By ADELLA HARDING - Staff Writer Dec 6, 2005

ELKO - Oil and gas leases in the U.S. Forest Service's Ruby Mountain Ranger District will be available at a March auction, but they won't make the deadline for a December auction.

"We're planning on working with BLM so these will be up in the March 2006 sale. We didn't get it done in time," said Doug Clarke of the Humboldt Toiyabe National Forest's Elko office.

U.S. Bureau of Land Management has a lease auction slated for Dec. 13 in Reno, but BLM's proposal to offer 202 parcels from Elko County also may be hung up in an appeal.

The leases for 42,000 acres of public land managed by the Forest Service in the Ruby Mountains will be offered without surface occupancy rights, unlike those BLM is offering statewide.

Clarke said anyone who buys the leases can go back to the Forest Service for a permit to occupy the surface, but the agency decided to wait until there is interest, rather than do a study now.

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Supervisor Bob Vaught wrote in his decision on the proposed leases that they “have a low known potential for undiscovered oil or gas reserves based on the geology present, nearby drilling and the general lack of industry interest in the area.”

He said most known oil and gas reserves in Nevada are in “valley fill” settings or areas where subsurface structures have been overlain and capped by flat lying valley fill sediments.

Vaught said “given the low potential for oil and gas on the national forest, minimal industry interest in the area and the national desire to appropriate oil and gas development, I have concluded that analysis of surface occupancy is unwarranted at this time.”

The Ruby Mountain area in question abuts land managed by the BLM and private lands in Huntington Valley that might be of interest, however.

“A lot of these lands are contiguous to BLM lands under lease or under consideration for leasing in the future, Clarke said. “So some company might be interested in obtaining them for a good land position.”

The potential Forest Service lease parcels are on the west side of the Ruby Mountains in an area that stretches from Sietz Canyon to Overland Pass, Clarke said. “They are scattered,” he said.

Katie Fife, biodiversity director for Western Watersheds Project, said Tuesday it appears the Forest Service is “just delaying until another day its examination of what would happen to streams etc. if development was allowed.”

The original request was for the Forest Service to open 45,000 acres for oil and gas leasing, but Vaught said 2,000 of those acres are in wilderness. Vaught's decision will be forwarded to the BLM, which has the oil and gas leasing authority for Forest Service and BLM lands.

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