

Wyoming Range Legacy Act FAQ

In October 2007, Wyoming's US Senator, John Barrasso, introduced legislation that would protect the Wyoming Range from future oil and gas drilling. The **Wyoming Range Legacy Act** builds upon efforts initiated by Senator Craig Thomas prior to his death and is supported by a wide coalition of homeowners, sportsmen, government officials, conservationists, and small businesses across Wyoming.

How would the bill protect the Wyoming Range?

This legislation would do two things. One, it would prevent any new oil and gas leasing in the Wyoming Range. Two, while existing leases are not affected, should an existing lease expire or be retired, then that area would be off limits to re-leasing.

What area is included?

If passed, this legislation would draw a boundary around portions of a rugged chain of mountains running north to south for 100 miles in western Wyoming. This boundary would only be drawn around federal public lands in the Wyoming Range portion of the Bridger Teton National Forest and would not include any currently producing leased areas on the Forest.

Would the bill impact current, undeveloped leases?

The bill would respect valid lease rights within the withdrawal boundary. But, as noted above, willing lease holders could sell or retire their leases to the federal government at fair market value. Funding for lease retirement could come from state, private groups, foundations, and others.

Would the legislation impact improperly leased lands?

Uncertainty still remains over the validity of 44,600 acres that were improperly offered for lease in 2005 and 2006. Some of these lease parcels have not been issued while others have been issued but are under suspension. Senator Barrasso recognizes these leases would be addressed separately from his legislation. The Bush Administration has the authority to cancel these leases and provide full refunds to leaseholders. These leases are within the withdrawal boundary of the proposed legislation so if they were cancelled or otherwise found invalid, that land would then be off-limits to future leasing.

Would the bill impact the proposal by PXP (Plains) from Houston to drill in the Hoback drainage and its expanded full field development proposal?

While the bill would fully respect private property rights (see above), in light of overwhelming public sentiment, Governor Freudenthal's opposition to the project, and opposition from the Wyoming Tourism Industry and others, it is hoped that PXP would take advantage of this creative legislative solution to willingly sell or donate its mineral lease rights located within the withdrawal boundary.

Has this sort of legislative approach happened before?

Yes. This legislation is similar to a bipartisan law passed last year that protects the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana. Similar legislation also passed for the Valle Vidal area in northern New Mexico.

What would be the economic impact of the Wyoming Range Legacy Act?

This bill would create a firm foundation for future prosperity by protecting lands critical for recreation, tourism, and agricultural economies for Wyoming. This act supports the long-term enhanced value of a growing Wyoming tourism industry and will ensure future economic diversity.

Do Wyoming's other elected official's support the Legislation?

Wyoming's senior Senator Mike Enzi supports and has co-sponsored this bill. Governor Dave Freudenthal also strongly supports the proposal. A number of local officials and state legislators also support protecting the Wyoming Range.

What other entities support this legislation to protect the Wyoming Range?

A wide variety of Wyomingites have mobilized to protect the Wyoming Range, including WY Outfitters and Guides, WY AFL-CIO, WY Tourism Bureau, as well as local landowners, ranchers, outfitters, sportsmen, and business owners. In addition, most of Wyoming's major newspapers have editorialized in support of protecting the Wyoming Range from any new leasing.

What Happens Next?

The Wyoming Range Legacy Act will not become law until passed by Congress and signed by the President. Currently, the bill is before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

How can I help out?

We need your assistance to see that this bill passes both the Senate and House in Congress as quickly as possible and then is sent to the President to be signed. You can help in two ways: First, send a letter to the editor of your local paper supporting the bill and thanking Senator Barrasso for his hard work. Second, contact Congresswoman Cubin and Senator Barrasso (and Cc Senator Enzi if possible) urging them to:

- work together to pass the Wyoming Legacy Act
- work with the Forest Service to see that they cancel the 44,600 acres of contested leases found along the eastern front of the Wyoming Range, an important gateway to the mountains for hunting, fishing, and recreating

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