



## State of New Mexico

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**Bill Richardson**  
Governor

Contact: Gilbert Gallegos  
505-476-2217

**Patricia Madrid**  
Attorney General

Contact: Sam Thompson  
505-222-9174

### **Governor Bill Richardson and Attorney General Patricia Madrid announce lawsuit on federal plan to drill at Otero Mesa**

ALBUQUERQUE - Governor Bill Richardson and Attorney General Patricia Madrid today announced that the State of New Mexico has filed a federal lawsuit challenging the Bureau of Land Management's decision to allow oil and gas leasing and exploration on 95% of Otero Mesa in southern New Mexico. The lawsuit was filed this morning in U.S. District Court.

Governor Richardson and Attorney General Madrid joined New Mexico ranchers and hunters in making the announcement at the University of New Mexico.

"This lawsuit is the result of the Bureau of Land Management's willful disregard for the State of New Mexico's interests," Governor Bill Richardson said. "The BLM is supposed to apply balance when it manages the public lands, and it is supposed to cooperate with the Governor of a state where it conducts land planning such as this.

"I proposed a balanced, comprehensive alternative - a mineral leasing closure on about half the area at Otero Mesa, with carefully managed oil and gas activity on the other half. The BLM rejected my proposal. Therefore, we're going to court."

Attorney General Madrid said, "By filing this lawsuit, we seek to protect one of the most biologically diverse and endangered arid ecosystems. The Bush Administration has

chosen special interests, namely the oil and gas industry, over their duty to protect this land for generations to come. We want to send a simple message to the federal government - 'not on our watch.' We will use every legal avenue available to protect this fragile land."

Governor Richardson last year offered a compromise to the BLM that would have allowed some drilling while protecting sensitive grasslands and ecosystems at Otero Mesa. BLM officials did not address the Governor's concerns, prompting the state to file an appeal. In response to the state's appeal the BLM continues to ignore the wishes of New Mexico ranchers, conservationists, sportsmen and others who want to protect the area.

Rick Simpson, Chairman of the Lincoln County Commission and an avid Sportsman & Outfitter said, "Right now this mesa is just like God made it and it would break my heart to cut it all up with roads and traffic-especially when there are better ways. We can protect the core areas and drill for gas from the edges-it just costs a little more."

Bill Humphries, former republican Commissioner of Public Land and former head of New Mexico Cattleman's Association, said, "I would like to express my appreciation and support for Governor Richardson's position on energy. "The governor is not against developing our oil & gas resources. None of us are. The attitude of how we do it is what is being expressed here today. The surface rights owners, in my opinion, need better protection. There are people who are my good friends who have been on the land down there at Otero Mesa for many generations. And I got involved because I think that they haven't been heard like they should be."

The Attorney General's Office filed the lawsuit on behalf of the state today in Federal District Court in Santa Fe.