

State of New Mexico

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Bill Richardson
Governor

Patricia Madrid
Attorney General

Contact: Gilbert Gallegos
505-476-2217

Contact: Sam Thompson
505-222-3174

Governor Bill Richardson and Attorney General Patricia Madrid Announce They Will Fight BLM on Otero Mesa Oil and Gas Leasing

BLM ignores state's alternatives and appeal

SANTA FE -- New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson and Attorney General Patricia Madrid expressed opposition to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's decision today to open vast areas of Otero Mesa to oil and gas leasing.

"Thousands of New Mexico ranchers, hunters and conservationists, regardless of party affiliation, are opposed to oil and gas leasing at Otero Mesa," said Governor Bill Richardson. "I am very disappointed by the Bush Administration's failure to respect New Mexico's position on oil and gas leasing in this precious, sensitive, and world-renowned area. The Interior Department is ignoring its stated policies of respecting and working with states regarding major land management decisions."

"We need to ensure that the State's voice is heard by national policy makers," said Attorney General Patricia Madrid. "We will pursue every avenue of appeal both administratively and in federal court. It is not acceptable for the BLM to fail to observe its' own written policy regarding the state's role in federal land management."

Governor Richardson in March offered a compromise to the BLM that would have allowed some leasing while protecting groundwater, grazing areas, hunting grounds and sensitive grasslands and ecosystems at Otero Mesa. BLM officials did not address the Governor's concerns, prompting the state to file an appeal in June.

"The State is going to fight this with everything we've got. By failing to compromise, the federal government might have taken two steps backward, tying this issue up for years," Governor Richardson said. "I just don't understand why the President and the Interior Department won't recognize the concerns of thousands of New Mexicans who demand this area be protected from insensitive drilling."

“I have worked hard on this issue. I sent the Interior Department the best analysis ever done by a state with respect to its land management process. Our plan protects most of Otero Mesa but allows leasing in some parts. Today’s action is not the way to build toward a bipartisan, balanced policy on the West’s public lands,” said Richardson.

“This approach also indicates a one-way, oil-only energy policy advocated by the Administration, which should lead by using diverse energy sources and reducing energy demand,” according to Richardson. “Such an approach would create more jobs and increase our Nation’s economic resilience.”

The Governor and the Attorney General agreed that the State will contest the BLM decisions in federal court, including the issuance of the Record of Decision and the denial of Governor Richardson’s administrative appeal.

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