

The Jonah Field – Poster Child for Drilling Gone Wrong

The Project

BLM approved an additional 3,100 wells in a field already containing 500, bringing the total well density to 64 to 128 wells per square mile. At this density, two-thirds of the 33,000-acre project area would become roads or drilling sites. BLM approved an off-site mitigation fund to compensate for the total destruction of these public lands.

A Horrible Precedent for Tight Sands Drilling:

- Much of the interior West contains tight

sandstone or tight shale gas reservoirs that could be drilled at similar densities. The mistakes of Jonah could be repeated in the 8,950-well Continental Divide-creston Project in the heart of the Red Desert, in the 4,200-well Hiawatha Project along the Wyoming-Colorado border, and in the lands surrounding Colorado's Roan Plateau.

- The BLM approved this ultra-high-density drilling despite the fact that drilling all of the new wells using directional drilling from pre-existing wellpads with little additional impact. EnCana had successfully drilled over 160 directional wells in the Jonah Field prior to approval of the infill. This violates FLMPA's "unnecessary or undue degradation" prohibition.
- A few key species of smaller wildlife, including the sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, and pygmy rabbit (petitioned for listing under the ESA) were still holding on in the Jonah Field, but now face elimination. A BLM-funded study predicts the extinction of the sage grouse in the Jonah Field within 18 years.



The Jonah Field before the Infill, at 16 wells per square mile already a total loss for most wildlife. EcoFlight photo



Pygmy rabbit. J. Witham photo

Economics of Directional Drilling in Jonah – It Could Have Been Done Right

- Gas in place: 13.5 Trillion Cubic Feet.
- Industry's gross income for producing this gas at 2007 gas prices: \$92 billion.
- Cost to drill all 3,100 wells vertically, at industry's reported \$2 million per well: \$6.2 billion.
- Additional cost to drill all 3,100 wells directionally, based on Encana's average of \$240,000 per well average for the first 140 directional wells: \$744 million.
- Industry's cost savings for not constructing additional roads or wellpads: unreported.



Top: Density of drilling for the Jonah Infill. Only tiny strips of vegetation will remain between the wellpads. BCA/LightHawk photo

Bottom: 21 pronghorn were killed in a collision with a wellfield truck in the Jonah Field in January. Courtesy SkyTruth.