Say No to Oil and Gas Development in the Heart of Washington County

The local Bureau of Land Management (BLM) office is processing an application to lease almost 5,000 acres of our public land for oil and gas drilling near Virgin just outside of Zion National Park and near Toquerville just north of St George. We can stop this negative impact to our economy and lifestyles with an outpouring of letters to the BLM explaining the reasons we think this lease should not be granted.

And there are plenty of reasons. The boom-bust economy offered by oil and gas production would hurt our tourism and outdoor recreation, and put a big dent in the desirability of living here, especially for the high-tech industry and employees we hope to attract. The county is already growing very quickly. We’re on the edge of acceptable air quality level for ozone. This operation’s impact on air quality, especially near Zion National Park, would be unacceptable. Increased traffic in the narrow corridor around Zion would also be unacceptable.

These lands have significant wilderness characteristics, with high value for recreation like hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, or just enjoying quiet solitude, sweeping vistas and clean air. It should not be spoiled with more roads, noise, air pollution, industrial equipment, oil spills and water pollution. Washington County has sufficient water to meet our growth needs if we carefully manage it. Risking water contamination from drilling, spills and leaks is unacceptable. These lease parcels are in the middle of our watersheds and near proposed future reservoirs. Contaminated waste water could easily leak into our water supply. There are several active earthquake zones that could be impacted. Our high-quality night sky would be impacted by night operations and natural gas flaring.

There is already a glut of fossil fuel development that is being increasingly challenged by clean energy. This operation with its damaging local effects would add unnecessarily to global climate change, which is predicted to have significant local impacts. There is no need to allow it on our scenic and sensitive local public lands that have such high value to us and our economy.

Let’s give the BLM a clear message that oil and gas production is not appropriate in our county. See our letter and reference materials on our website at <http://conserveswu.org/csu-letter-blm-oil-gas-exploration/>. Use the letter, the reference materials and this article as background to write your own letter, or just copy the letter and adjust it to make it your own. Personal letters have more impact than a form letter. The easiest way is to email your letter to utsgmail@blm.gov, but you can fax it to 435-688-3252, or mail it to Bureau of Land Management, St. George Field Office, Attn: Dave Corry, 345 East Riverside Drive, St. George, Utah 84790. Although there is a request for an extension on the public comment period, letters currently must be sent or postmarked by next Friday, February 10th.

Please take this simple action to help protect the reasons you live here.

Tom Butine is the Board President of Conserve Southwest Utah, the local nonprofit organization advocating conservation of our land, water and air, and smart growth policies that support conservation. For more information, visit <http://conserveswu.org/>.