

THE ROLE OF THE USDI FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE IN PERMITTING ENERGY DEVELOPMENT IN MONTANA

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The National Energy Policy was codified in 2005 by the Energy Bill of that year. The goal of the legislation was to decrease U.S. dependence on foreign energy supplies by increasing U.S. production, efficiency, and use of alternative fuels. As part of the effort to increase domestic oil and gas production, an Energy Pilot Project was initiated to streamline oil and gas exploration and production permitting on Federally owned mineral estate. This project provided money to key BLM Field Offices in the West for staff that would be dedicated to permitting oil and gas projects in a timely manner. Money was also appropriated for personnel in supporting agencies with regulatory authority over oil and gas projects. The USDI Fish and Wildlife Service has added staff, often co-located in USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Field Offices to coordinate endangered species consultation and other aspects of wildlife management required by statute. In Montana, there are numerous challenges facing wildlife and land managers in the Powder River Basin of southeastern Montana as they cope with increasing extraction of coal bed methane gas reserves. The USDI Fish and Wildlife Service continues to engage with all interested parties to find solutions to these complex challenges.