

COAL BED METHANE: BOOM FOR INDUSTRY, BANE FOR WILDLIFE ^{TWS}

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Associated with coal seams in southeast Montana is natural gas referred to as coal bed methane (CBM), held there by water pressure. To get the gas, the water must first be removed. There is great interest by industry and state and federal administrations to pump and use this resource. It will take only 10-20 years of boom and bust development to drain Montana of its methane resource. This will have severe impacts to wildlife in perpetuity. CBM development will negatively affect Montana's water and lands forever, regardless of "reclamation." Aquifers, springs and seeps depended upon by farmers, ranchers and wildlife will be dried up. Water pumped from these aquifers, although drinkable by humans and wildlife, is very salty and kills vegetation. This water will be sprinkled across the land and pumped to leaking discharge pits killing vegetation and soil. Surface destruction by this industry will be massive. Thousands of miles of powerlines, pipelines, and access roads will lace sagebrush-grasslands of southeast Montana supporting pronghorn, mule deer and white-tailed deer and dwindling populations of sage grouse. Huge noisy compressors will drown the calls of many bird species including sage and sharp-tailed grouse. Well pads with access roads will dot the countryside, and trucks of every size will careen down dusty roads 24 hours a day. Fragmentation of wildlife habitat will occur from this resource development at levels never before experienced in Montana. Tens of thousands of acres of sagebrush-grassland habitats will be destroyed. It is unlikely any will be reclaimed in kind or function. There will be soil compaction, weed encroachment, and the cut-and-run philosophy will once again leave Montana citizens holding the reclamation bag, and wildlife populations the victims of lost and fragmented habitat.