

# **Environmentalists say wildlife is not adequately protected**

**By The Associated Press**

PINEDALE - A conservation group asked a federal judge Wednesday to halt further drilling within a booming natural-gas field in western Wyoming.

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership claims the government has reneged on promises to shield deer, sage grouse and other wildlife from energy development in the Pinedale Anticline. The geologic formation an hour south of Jackson has an estimated 21 trillion cubic feet of natural gas - one of the largest reserves in the United States.

About 1,000 wells have gone in so far, and a pending plan would allow 4,400 more over the next 60 years.

The fast pace of development, coupled with the presence of large numbers of deer, grouse and other game species on the Anticline, have made the area a battleground for the Bush administration's pro-energy policies.

Wednesday's lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., accused the Bureau of Land Management of authorizing drilling despite the agency's own predictions that wildlife populations will decline. It also said the agency failed to follow through on a 2000 commitment to monitor wildlife and restore affected populations.

"This is an area with world-class wildlife populations," said Katie McKalip with the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. "The BLM violations have resulted in severe damage to wildlife across the Anticline."

McKalip said the group is not seeking to stop ongoing production, but wants wildlife issues addressed before more drilling is permitted.

A BLM spokeswoman, Teresa Howes, said the agency had not yet received the lawsuit.

The litigation comes as three companies - Shell Exploration and Production, Ultra Resources and Questar Exploration and Production - have asked for the removal of some drilling restrictions as they seek to sharply expand drilling.

Current rules shut down development for months at a time during wildlife breeding and migration seasons.

Company representatives contend that by working year-round on some areas of the Anticline, they could drill, remove most equipment and then restore the landscape more quickly.

"We believe we can develop the field better. We know more about the resource and how we can efficiently develop that resource and further reduce the effects to wildlife and habitat," said Deena McMullen of Shell Exploration.

McMullen said her company believes the BLM has met all of its environmental obligations under the 2000 plan.