

Forest Service cautious about evaluating well

By The Associated Press

POWELL - The U.S. Forest Service likely will not complete an environmental assessment of a proposed natural-gas well inside the Shoshone National Forest until early June at the soonest, forest spokeswoman Susie Douglas said.

"We know this is going to get a lot of public scrutiny, so we want to do a really good job," Douglas said.

The site is located about a quarter-mile inside the forest's boundary, about seven miles northeast of Clark. The environmental assessment will determine if a rig can be constructed there and with what restrictions.

The company seeking to drill the exploratory well, Windsor Energy Group, was responsible for a gas blowout in 2006. That incident occurred at about a mile south of the proposed site.

The blowout contaminated groundwater, and Windsor still is working to clean it up.

That history has made Clark residents and environmental activists wary of a new rig. Public meetings on the proposed Shoshone well drew complaints and concerns from locals.

"They're very concerned, and they should be," Douglas said.

Shoshone environmental policy coordinator Marty Sharp said the Forest Service received 45 comments on the well during its public scoping period. The comments included concerns about air and water quality, emergency planning and the impacts of increased traffic on the dirt road that leads to the site.

Over the next four months or so, experts from the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management will assess the proposed well's effects.

If the gas well is eventually approved, it would be the first on Shoshone National Forest land in more than 10 years.