

# Sportsmen's group targets energy development

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BILLINGS, Mont. -- Backed by a 10-point "Sportsmen's Bill of Rights," hunters and anglers are uniting to lobby for responsible energy development in the West.

"Everyone is looking for a way forward in the debate about how we continue to drill for oil and gas and protect wildlife at the same time," Mike Dombeck, former chief of the U.S. Forest Service, said in a statement.

"Sportsmen are providing solutions."

Sportsmen United for Responsible Energy Development announced the bill of rights Wednesday. Partners include Trout Unlimited, the National Wildlife Federation and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.

"I think it's a great idea," said Herb Stoick, president of the Laurel, Mont., Rod and Gun Club. "As sportsmen and recreationists, we have to stand up for our rights. Once some of that land is gone, it's gone for our use."

Montana hunters and anglers have spoken out when energy development proposed on federal lands threatened wildlife habitat and fisheries. Last year, sportsmen rallied to protect the upper Beaverhead River drainage in southwestern Montana from oil and gas leasing. The river is a prized trout fishery.

"We can't be fractionalized," Stoick said. "If we don't start standing up together, we won't have the power to do anything."

According to its Web site, Sportsmen United for Responsible Energy Development is working to "strike a balance between energy development and conservation in the West by reforming the laws, regulations, and policies that ensure respect for the traditions of the West." The group says 126,000 new gas wells are set for production across 26 million acres of Bureau of Land Management acreage in the West.

The Sportsmen's Bill of Rights includes:

- \* The public lands that hunters and anglers depend upon shall remain in the public's hands for the use of future generations.
- \* Hunters and anglers shall have a voice in decisions affecting oil and gas development on public lands.
- \* Public lands shall be managed for many uses, including hunting and fishing.

Although the coalition involves national groups, they rely on local hunting and fishing clubs such as the one in Laurel for support.

"We used to be just a quiet little club," Stoick said. "But we are trying to get our heads out of the sand. A few of us decided we need to stick up for what we have or we won't have anything left."