

2 Utah areas on list of West's 'imperiled' land

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(AP) -- A sportsmen's group has placed two Utah wildlife areas on a list of the West's 10 most imperiled places to hunt and fish because of threats posed by oil and gas development, the Deseret News said in a story published Sunday.

Utah's Uinta National Forest east of Provo and the Book Cliff's region in eastern [Utah](#) are among the areas considered irreplaceable landscapes vital to fish and wildlife and prized by hunters and anglers.

The designation is part of the "Hunting and Fishing Imperiled" report released Thursday by the group Sportsmen for Responsible Energy Development.

The group is a coalition of 500 businesses, organization and individuals that work to conserve public lands and wildlife habitat for future generations.

The group is led by Trout Unlimited, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and the National Wildlife Federation.

The report contends that between 2000 and 2008, the number of permits for oil and gas development tripled. It says an estimated 126,000 new wells are planned for the next 20 years, and 26 million acres - an area larger than Ohio - are already leased for development.

"Unfortunately, because some of the development is poorly planned, America's outdoor legacy is at risk," the report states.

A "chicken pox" pattern of oil and gas development has created a dramatic shift in Western landscapes across five states named in the report, Steve Torbit, Rocky Mountain regional director of the National Wildlife Federation, said in a teleconference with reporters.

"Sportsmen understand that the country needs energy," Torbit said. "We believe in energy development, but responsible energy development. What we would like to do is pull back from that chaotic approach of the last eight years."

In Utah, the Uinta National Forest has become a target for energy exploration, with 165,000 acres leased for development since 2004, mostly in the Diamond Fork and Strawberry Valley regions, the report states.

Utah's Book Cliffs region has also been favored by energy developers, the report says, with much of the area already leased.

The Bureau of Land Management estimates 7,800 new natural gas wells will be drilled near Vernal and Price. A 45-mile highway is also planned through the region, disrupting crucial winter range for deer.

The sportsmen's report includes a number of site-specific recommendations, but overall the coalition is urging improved planning, adoption of best management practices, better public involvement and improved monitoring and mitigation.

On the Web: Sportsmen's report:

<http://www.sportsmen4responsibleenergy.org>

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