

# **New Mexico State Land Office**

**Patrick H. Lyons, Commissioner of Public Lands**



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
January 21, 2010

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## **LAND COMMISSIONER SAYS HE WON'T LEASE WHITES PEAK FOR OIL AND GAS PRODUCTION**

SANTA FE -- Ninety five percent of the State Land Office's revenue comes from energy production, but Land Commissioner Patrick Lyons says he won't lease trust lands in Whites Peak for oil and gas development.

The commissioner said comments he made Monday to the Albuquerque Journal editorial board regarding oil and gas drilling on trust lands in the Whites Peak region were meant to address the protection of the trust's mineral rights when concurrent development on adjacent private land occurs.

"My goal for this area remains unchanged: consolidate Land Office holdings, control trespass, improve access, and facilitate land management programs to enhance forest health and wildlife habitat," Lyons said.

Commissioner Lyons says he has been approached by producers interested in exploring the Whites Peak area, and while he did review a proposal to lease 60,000 acres he denied the application.

Instead, Lyons countered, offering nearly 16,000 acres south and east of Whites Peak area.

"I moved the area of interest away from Whites Peak because I am unwilling to lease these lands for oil and gas development," Lyons said.

Lyons pointed out that the existing leases are intermingled with private lands and he leased the acreage to ensure that trust oil and gas would not be drained by nearby production on private lands.

"Oil and gas will migrate to producing wells and landowners must be vigilant in protecting the assets under their lands," the commissioner said. "With all the private leasing going on in the area it is a very real possibility that Land Office oil and gas would be produced with no compensation to the trust."

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Lyons has a fiduciary responsibility to generate revenue from the trust lands he manages and he believes confining leasing activity outside the Whites Peak area is an equitable decision.

The land commissioner and the State Land Office manage 9 million acres of surface estate and 13 million mineral acres held in trust to support public education and other state-supported institutions and programs. Revenues earned from energy production, farming and ranching, and community and business development on trust lands support public schools, seven universities, the New Mexico Military Institute, the New Mexico School for the Deaf, the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, three hospitals, correctional facilities, public building repair and construction, and water conservation projects.

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