



Aubrey Dunn, State Land Commissioner
State of New Mexico

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Contact:

Gerald Garner Jr., Public Relations Specialist

(505) 827-5760 (O)

(505) 489-0393 (C)

ggarner@slo.state.nm.us

Dunn discourages drilling on Otero Mesa

SANTA FE, NM – State Land Commissioner Aubrey Dunn is discouraging future oil and gas activities on Otero Mesa in Otero County in Southern New Mexico.

Citing the region’s fragile ecosystem, Commissioner Dunn said efforts must be undertaken to ensure Otero Mesa’s fresh water, and diverse animal and plant species do not fall victim to contamination from oil and gas industry drilling activity.

“We should discourage all drilling activity on Otero Mesa until better infrastructure and more regulators can be put in place to ensure that any oil and gas activity is done properly in order to protect the region from catastrophic environmental damage,” Commissioner Dunn said.

Environmental concerns have been well documented in the area for decades. Those concerns eventually prompted then Gov. Bill Richardson to issue Executive Order 2004-005 “State Agencies Conserve and Protect Resources of Otero Mesa” in 2004.

Though protecting the region’s fresh water supply remains the primary focus of many, concerns regarding the area’s unique flora and fauna have also surfaced.

In its own rulemaking on Otero Mesa, Oil Conservation Division’s (OCD) own witness testified that the Chihuahuan Desert Ecoregion – which includes Otero Mesa – is one of the world’s most species-diverse regions and home to several endangered plant species unique to the area.

Fast forward nearly 15 years and Commissioner Dunn said the protection efforts are even more warranted today.

“I’ve seen firsthand what oil and gas development has done right next door (to Otero Mesa) in Eddy County. There is so much activity and not nearly enough OCD boots on the ground to properly monitor the actions of the companies currently drilling in the Permian Basin,” Commissioner Dunn said. “This poses a huge threat to our environment; we’ve seen the damage on State Trust Lands down south and in no way, shape or form do I want to see that happen on Otero Mesa.”

Commissioner Dunn, whose four-year term as Commissioner of Public Lands ends on Dec. 31, 2018, said that his successor will have to address this concern as State Trust Lands in Otero County are affected.

Oil, gas, and mineral production, ranching and farming, and commercial development on State Trust Lands support public schools, seven universities, New Mexico Military Institute, New Mexico School for the Deaf, New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, three hospitals, correctional facilities, water conservation projects, and public building construction and repair. In fiscal year 2017, the State Land Office collected \$664 million from lease payments, oil and gas lease sale earnings, rights-of-way, permits, interest, fees, and oil, gas, and mineral royalties.