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We Did It!

Hoback Drilling Leases Acquired from PXP; Lease Retirement Process Underway Thanks to Unprecedented Local Effort

JACKSON, Wy – The Trust for Public Land, working with a broad coalition of environmental organizations, concerned citizens, and more than 1,000 donors, announced today it has completed a transaction to purchase oil and gas leases on 58,000 acres of sensitive land in Wyoming’s Hoback Basin. The acquisition means that affected land inside the Bridger-Teton National Forest near Grand Teton National Park will be forever saved from oil and gas drilling and preserved for hunting, fishing, and recreation. The Trust for Public Land purchased the leases from Plains Exploration & Production Company (NYSE: PXP).

Local and national supporters joined forces to raise the \$8.75 million needed to meet the December 31 purchase deadline. The largest donor was Hansjörg Wyss, a businessman and philanthropist who lives in nearby Wilson, Wyoming. Mr. Wyss contributed \$4.25 million through his charitable foundation.

“I’m pleased to be able to support a practical, Wyoming solution that – with this milestone – is now a proud American legacy. This is about neighbors and communities coming together to protect an iconic Western landscape, so the Wyoming Range will always remain open for everyone to hunt, fish, hike, and explore,” said Hansjörg Wyss, who created the Wyss Foundation in 1989 to help Western communities conserve iconic parks and landscapes.

Entrepreneur and philanthropist Joe Ricketts contributed a total of \$1.75 million, becoming the campaign’s major closing donor with an eleventh-hour gift of \$750,000 that propelled the campaign across the finish line. “I’m proud to have been able to play a role in helping to preserve this magnificent landscape for future generations. The outpouring of support for this project was inspiring and demonstrates how much the people of Wyoming value the outdoors and how hard we’ll work to protect our natural resources,” Ricketts said.

The Hoback Basin is beloved by local residents for its rich hunting and fishing grounds and astounding natural beauty. The land affected by the oil and gas leases acquired under this agreement includes the headwaters of the Hoback River, a congressionally designated wild and scenic river. The river was named America’s 5th most endangered in 2012 by American Rivers, the nation’s leading river conservation organization. The Hoback Basin is also a crucial pathway for migrating animals including mule deer, pronghorn antelope, and elk.

The framework for the agreement between The Trust for Public Land and PXP was announced in Jackson on October 4. That began a three-month fundraising period, during which The Trust for Public Land, Wyoming Outdoor Council, American Rivers, Citizens for the Wyoming Range, The Wilderness Society, and many other individuals and organizations worked to raise the \$8.75 million to complete the deal.

Steelworkers in nearby Rock Springs contributed \$1,500 in union dues to support the cause, local bands staged benefit concerts, and hundreds of supporters donated \$150 each to “save an acre.” The Pinedale Anticline Project Office also voted unanimously to provide \$200,000 to help mitigate the impact of gas drilling elsewhere in the region. The Pinedale Anticline Project Office Board includes numerous representatives from state and local government and is funded by oil and gas royalties.

“I can’t think of a better way to start off the New Year. This solution honors the wishes of the people of Wyoming and protects a vital corner of Greater Yellowstone for generations to come,” said Will Rogers, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Trust for Public Land. “I am awed and inspired by the generosity of Hansjörg Wyss, Joe Ricketts, and the thousands of local residents who worked together to protect this land. Thanks to all of them, we are saving the Hoback,” Rogers added.

Approximately 85 percent of the acquired leases fall within the boundaries of the Wyoming Range Legacy Act, a landmark land conservation measure signed into law as part of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009. Among other provisions, the Legacy Act allows leases to be retired permanently when bought out, instead of being re-sold to other oil and gas companies. The Trust for Public Land has already begun the process of permanently retiring leases within the Legacy Act boundary. The organization will hold title to the remaining leases for a limited time while developing a long-term retirement solution with state and federal officials.

“This is an enormously gratifying day. I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to Mr. Wyss, Mr. Ricketts, and all the citizens who worked diligently to protect this magnificent area. Energy workers, miners, ranchers, sportsmen, homeowners, and even musicians in our community came together, and this announcement is a direct result of their efforts. The work to protect the Wyoming Range is not complete, but this campaign has reached a successful and appropriate end,” said Dan Smitherman, a former Marine and outfitter who works closely with Citizens for the Wyoming Range, a grassroots organization created to explore alternatives to drilling in the Hoback.

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Founded in 1972, The Trust for Public Land is the leading nonprofit working to conserve land for people. Operating from more than 30 offices nationwide, The Trust for Public Land has protected more than three million acres from the inner city to the wilderness and helped generate more than \$34 billion in public funds for conservation. Nearly ten million people live within a ten-minute walk of a Trust for Public Land park, garden, or natural area, and millions more visit these sites every year. Learn more at [tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org/) (<http://www.tpl.org/>)

The Wyss Foundation helps Western communities conserve iconic parks and landscapes for the public to experience and explore. The Foundation's work has included support for the [Montana Legacy Project's](#) efforts to permanently protect former Plum Creek timber lands in the Crown of the Continent as working forests, open for hunting, fishing, and recreation. Through the [Wyss Scholars](#) and [Wyss Fellows](#) programs, the Foundation also helps young people gain the education and experiences needed to pursue successful careers in natural resource stewardship.