

Leasing process leaves out public input

The Daily Home

May 27, 2012 | 869 views | 1 | 2 | |

If you knew where to look on the Bureau of Land Management's website for notice of lease sales, and if you remembered to check it every week or so and download the PDF documents, you might have known about the deadline for comments on the June 14 lease sale of land in Talladega National Forest. Apparently the notice was posted March 16, with a 30-day deadline for comments. As far as we can tell, that is the only public notice that was given, and the April 16 deadline for comments passed before the notice got much notice. Only one comment was filed within the 30-day window.

A bureau spokesman said the agency was prompted to offer parcels in the forest for lease by parties he says he can't name because of confidentiality.

Environmental groups have been actively trying to pressure politicians to stop the sale, and have been successful in focusing attention on the issue. The Heflin City Council drew up a resolution trying to stop it. State Sen. Gerald Dial got a Senate resolution passed opposing it. Congressman Mike Rogers wrote to the director of the bureau asking that the protest filing period be extended, and that the BLM schedule a public meeting in the lease area to discuss different types of energy extraction that could result.

Rogers said he had received numerous complaints regarding concern over the auction and the manner in which the lease sale was noticed.

Concerns over a type of drilling called hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, have been made, with references to environmental threats associated with that technique. Concerns over possible contamination of water sources was frequently cited, with particular mention of problems in Pennsylvania and Colorado. Fracking proponents say those are isolated incidents, not the norm.

We appreciate both the concerns for the environment that have been expressed and the benefits of extracting domestic energy sources.

But the manner in which this process has been handled appears to have been intentionally designed to exclude public input.

At this point, we think Rogers' request for an extension of the protest filing period and for the bureau to take the initiative in informing the public is the right response. The risks and benefits involved in mining need to be weighed against the competing public interests before a decision is made on leasing the land, and that hasn't happened.

It may be too little too late, but we appreciate Rogers and the other elected officials for taking a stand on behalf of the people who have the most to lose if the environmental fears are realized.

Read more: [The Daily Home - Leasing process leaves out public input](#)