

Policy implications of local and regional socioeconomic impacts from oil shale development in NW Colorado

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This session is intended as a discussion panel, which will address policy requirements if government, industry and communities are to successfully address the range of socioeconomic impacts arising from a potential oil shale industry in NW Colorado. It is not intended to either promote or oppose development of oil shale, but would instead explore the prudent planning and policy steps necessary to integrate the industry into the existing business and lifestyle scenarios of the region. Components will include discussion from the perspectives of panel members, including current elected county and municipal government officials from NW Colorado and representatives of other impacted local service providers such as school districts, hospital districts, and non-profit organizations. It will be informed by the most recent cumulative impacts study commissioned by local governments in the region and completed by a national consulting firm. Other information resources would include reports cited in the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for current research and development efforts, as well as policies used during previous attempts at oil shale development. The hope would be to generate a vigorous concluding discussion focused on short and long-term strategies to minimize any potential negative impacts and maximize community benefits should a commercial oil shale industry be developed. In addition it would involve panel members in an exchange with attendees from the industry and its regulators. Current research and development is understandably focused on scientific and technical issues surrounding the variety of processes that might be used to extract the oil shale product. Most contemporary policy debate concerns regulatory issues surrounding potential commercial leasing as envisioned by Congress in 2008 and the review of those policies ordered recently by the Department of Interior. There has been little discussion of the planning and policy steps that would enable the industry and its host communities to address socioeconomic impacts cooperatively and how those strategies might be implemented in the near and long term. Perhaps this examination at the Symposium could begin that necessary discussion.