

# THE THREE-STAGE COALBED METHANE DECISION PROCESS IN THE VALLE VIDAL

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## STAGE 1. FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT

*The Forest Service must prepare a "Forest Plan." Here, the Carson National Forest already has a Forest Plan in place, but it does not pertain to the Valle Vidal. Therefore, the Forest Service must prepare a Forest Plan "Amendment." This stage is supposed to begin April 2005, and may be completed by September 2006*

### **Formal public participation is provided at three points:**

- (1) At the beginning of the process, the public can provide input on the scope of the project and issues that should be considered;
  - (2) Once a "draft" is prepared, the public can review it and provide comment; and
  - (3) Once a "final" is completed, but before a formal decision is reached, the public can "object" to the Forest Plan Amendment.
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## STAGE 2. LEASING ANALYSIS

*If the Forest Service determines in the Forest Plan Amendment (Stage 1) that the Valle Vidal is suitable for oil and gas development, it will then begin another process to determine whether or not to allow the sale of oil & gas leases. Stage 2 begins once Stage 1 is complete. Assuming Stage 2 begins September 2006, it may be completed within 18-24 months.*

### **Similar to a Forest Plan Amendment, formal public participation is provided at three points:**

- (1) At the beginning of the process, the public can provide input on the scope of the project and issues that should be considered;
  - (2) Once a "draft" is prepared, the public can review it and provide comment; and
  - (3) Once a final decision to allow leasing is reached, the public may administratively appeal the decision (which is a bit different from a Forest Plan "objection")
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## STAGE 3. DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS

*If oil & gas leases are sold (Stage 2), the Forest Service waits for the oil & gas company – the "lessee" – to submit a development proposal. The Forest Service then prepares a project-specific analysis.*

**The Forest Service must diligently involve the public, and provide notice, but the specific level of public participation is less clear.**

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