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## Salazar aide: Oil shale not ready for 'prime time'

Energy » Obama plans a cautious approach to developing the resource.

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Petroleum companies' plans to tap the Rocky Mountains' abundant oil shale reserves are "not ready for prime time," a senior legal adviser to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar told a Utah energy conference Wednesday.

Steve Black said the Obama administration is taking a deliberate, cautious approach on making federal lands available for major oil shale development because nobody has shown they can squeeze the oil out of hard rock economically.

"I don't know when we'll see commercial development on public lands," Black told the Unconventional Fuels Conference, a gathering of leading researchers and small outfits with experimental oil shale works. "It's an industry that is not ready for prime time."

Todd Dana, founder of Salt Lake City-based RedLeaf Resources Inc., one of the active oil-shale players that is working state trust lands, said the federal government's reluctance to make larger and richer deposits of oil shale available stands in the way of progress.

Extracting kerogen, a half-baked form of petroleum, locked inside shale has proven a tough nut to crack. But industry players say the Obama administration isn't providing regulatory guidance or enough land to interest major oil companies or investors. They asserted the Obama administration has little or no interest in -- or has outright hostility toward -- developing oil shale reserves.

Others say widespread development would lay waste to parts of Colorado, Utah and Wyoming.

"This administration supports responsible development of all energy resources in the right place and at the right time," said Black, counselor to Salazar, a former Colorado senator who has been critical of failed attempts 30 years ago to develop oil shale there.

Black found himself forced to deny assertions that Salazar secretly opposed any significant oil shale development, which would require a lot of water and electric power.

"He has never said privately or publicly that his intention is to kill oil shale," Black said. "We're not trying to pick winners or losers."

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