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For Immediate Release
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Independent Study: Oil Shale Is a Poor Energy Source

BOUDLER, CO – As the nation looks for new sources of fuel, one option being considered is oil shale. But a new report released today by Western Resource Advocates reveals that oil shale is no solution at all because it takes nearly as much energy to produce as it yields. With very little fuel to be gained by producing synthetic oil from oil shale, oil shale should be removed from serious consideration as an alternative to conventional crude oil.

The report “An Assessment of the Energy Return on Investment (EROI) of Oil Shale,” shows that oil shale’s EROI is extremely low. EROI is a comparison of the amount of energy that goes into a production process versus the amount of energy delivered by the process. As one of the lowest EROI fuel options out there, oil shale should be considered a marginal energy source.

According to report author Dr. Cutler Cleveland, a Professor of geography and environment at Boston University, the best scientific analysis suggests that the EROI for oil shale falls between 1:1 and 2:1 when internal energy is counted as a cost. Internal energy includes the energy produced during oil shale processing that is then consumed to further power that operation. An EROI of 1:1 means there is no energy “profit” from the investment of energy.

A low EROI is not oil shale’s only flaw. Oil shale production is water-intensive, leaving less water available for western farms and communities. Additionally, a Stanford University study found the large energy inputs that must go into oil shale production would lead to greenhouse gases emissions 20% to 75% larger than those from conventional crude oil.

“Westerners must understand the trade-offs they will make if public lands and resources are signed over to private companies in the hopes of making oil shale a transportation fuel source,” said Karin P. Sheldon, President, WRA. “In exchange for a fuel that may not produce more energy that it consumes, we may be forced to bear the costs to our water supplies, the air we breathe, and to our lands,” said Sheldon.

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Dr. Cleveland's report shows the EROI for oil shale is considerably less than the EROI of conventional crude oil, both at the wellhead and at the refined fuel stages of processing. Even under marginal production conditions, conventional crude oil still generates a significantly larger energy surplus than oil shale – approximately 20:1.

“Before expending public or private dollars to support any future commercial development projects, the public has a right to know about the low return on investment for oil shale,” said Sheldon. “Cleveland's analysis is proof that the impacts to the West would far outweigh any perceived benefits,” said Sheldon.

To read the report, go to: <http://www.westernresourceadvocates.org/land/oseroi.php>

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