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Sheriff's deputies to escort Niobrara play seismic mappers in southeast Wyoming

A seismic testing company mapping underground formations in search of oil in southeast Wyoming will pay sheriff's deputies to escort crews, answer questions and cool landowners' tempers.

Deputies from the Laramie County Sheriff's Department will escort crews from Houston-based Global Geophysical Services and deal with any landowner questions or concerns in that part of the developing Niobrara play, said department spokesman Gerry Luce.

"We can have deputies there to assist and make sure there aren't situations that may escalate beyond a conversation," Luce said. "When the boom hit here, there was some misunderstanding of what the company's representatives were allowed to do versus what the landowners do to preserve their personal land rights."

Luce said he's not sure how many deputies will escort the crews, but said it'll be a minimal number. Global Geophysical Services will pay an hourly wage to off-duty deputies, said Duncan Riley, the company's vice president of operations in the U.S. and Canada.

Riley wouldn't disclose what the company would pay, and Luce said he didn't have that information.

"It's being borne by Global Geophysical, so there's no cost to the taxpayer for this service," he said.

The deputies will carry information on split estate statutes in Wyoming, that allow different owners of a plot of land's surface and its underground minerals. The deputies will also carry contact information for those who want additional information, Luce said.

Global Geophysical asked to hire the deputies to help answer landowner questions and avoid calls to 911 when landowners saw strangers, Riley said.

"It's more for the convenience of the folks that live there and the citizens more than anything else," Riley said. "To a certain extent, there's been a lot of dialog and discussion with some residents in the area as to to what permits allow one to do."

The crew will drive vehicles with large tires down roads in the subdivision, and crews will set up listening devices on either side of the road to pick up bounced back signals from shockwaves pounded into the ground. Those signals help map out the underlying formations and provide guidance for oil drillers.

Seismic testing crews have ranged over large swaths of southeast Wyoming on the hunt for oil in the area.

The company asked for the escort in an eastern subdivision of Cheyenne, said Wyoming Oil and Gas Supervisor Tom Doll, who was briefed on the plan.

While some of the landowners signed off on the testing, but some didn't and are opposing the company's work, he said.

"So they're trying to block public access, and that's illegal," he said. ""If they can get in and get out, that'll be the least amount of disturbance for everyone," he said.

The company did get permits to do its work from the city and Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, Doll said.

The company has also posted a \$200,000 bond and Doll said he has an inspector that keeps an eye on its operations.

Riley of Global Geophysical said the crews will finish their work by the end of February.