

BLM legislation passes in Senate

Erny Zah / The Daily Times

FARMINGTON — The U.S. Senate has approved a bill that would provide funding to the Bureau of Land Management to expedite permits for oil and natural gas wells, according to a press release.

“This is a great step forward for our BLM offices in Carlsbad and Farmington to ensure they will have the necessary resources to balance the complex demands of oil and gas permitting and environmental management,” said Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M.



Udall co-sponsored the bill with 13 other senators including New Mexico's other senator, Martin Heinrich, also a Democrat.

The Senate version of the bill was introduced in June and would deliver more money to the BLM offices that face the highest volumes of permit requests.

The bill would increase permits fees from \$6,500 to \$9,500, but 75 percent of the money generated would go directly to the office where the permit originates.

The bill would also permanently reauthorize funding for the Permit Processing Improvement Fund, which would give about \$18 million a year to the Secretary of the Interior.

The money is distributed to pilot programs that provide support staff for permitting, and wildlife and range management.

New language in the bill would also authorize the Interior Secretary to use the money for new programs that may be created to meet the permitting demands of various industries.

If approved, the new fees would start in 2016.

The New Mexico Oil and Gas Association worked with Udall to create the bill.

“We’re supportive ... on that bill,” said NMOGA president Steve Henke in an interview last month.

The Western Energy Alliance also has endorsed the bill, according to the release.