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### **Northern Montana Thrust Belt: A Giant Gas Field Province Ripe for Exploration**

Natural gas was discovered in the Northern Montana Thrust Belt in the mid-1950's, at Blackleaf Canyon and Two Medicine Fields. Both discovery wells had IP's of greater than 10 MMCFGPD. However, these fields were shut-in and eventually abandoned due to low gas prices and distance from pipelines. By the early 1980's gas prices had risen sufficiently to warrant construction of pipelines to these fields, and limited production from the Mississippian was established (7.1 BCF) before the fields were once again shut-in due to low prices. The Mississippian play is still in the frontier exploration stages and recent estimates from the Potential Gas Agency indicate the Montana Folded Belt has an undiscovered resource potential of at least 12.6 TCF.

Over 100,000 acres of active leases were suspended south of Marias Pass by the U.S. government in 1986, awaiting environmental studies. These studies were completed by the early 1990's, and the Department of Interior actually approved a drilling permit in the area in early 1993. This proposal is only two miles from an existing gas pipeline and on trend with the giant Waterton Gas Field (4 TCF), in adjacent Alberta. Unfortunately, the permit was suspended by incoming Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt in June of 1993, and activity in the area died. However, rising gas prices, the proximity to existing gas lines/transportation corridors, the magnitude of potential gas reserves, and the government's new apparent willingness to allow drilling in this area is renewing interest in this part of the Montana Thrust Belt.