

## Broad alliance of Coloradans thanks congressmen Salazar and Udall on Roan Plateau Leasing 'time out' affirms public input for plateau protection

A broad alliance of citizen groups, municipalities, and wildlife advocates today lauded Congressmen John Salazar and Mark Udall's announcement that they are seeking funding limitations to halt the immediate leasing of western Colorado's Roan Plateau for oil and gas drilling. Area governments, thousands of citizens, and wildlife, recreation, and conservation groups have persistently urged protection for these remarkable public lands. Today's announcement is an affirmation of those years of public support.

"The City of Glenwood Springs, and all our citizens, owe great thanks to Congressmen Salazar and Udall for their leadership in working to ensure that the Roan Plateau is properly managed," said Bruce Christensen, mayor of the nearby City of Glenwood Springs. "If enacted, this effort will give area governments and communities the chance to fully consider how best to protect Roan Plateau. As a cooperating agency with BLM in drafting the plan, this is what our city has been asking for all along: full consideration of a plan to really protect the critical lands of the Roan Plateau."

Roan Plateau sits as an undeveloped island of important wildlife habitat and backcountry lands amid North America's fastest growing natural gas field. This 73,000 acre area of public lands provides critical winter habitat at its base, and pure strains of native cutthroat trout in the streams that cut deep canyons across the plateau. These lands deserve protection, which is in the best interest of Colorado.

"We commend Congressmen Salazar and Udall for their decision to ask for this funding limitation. Roan Plateau is important as habitat for mule deer and many other species of wildlife. The public has long supported protection for these resources," said Suzanne O'Neil with the Colorado Wildlife Federation. "While it is very important to protect the top of the Roan Plateau, it is also necessary to recognize that the rim is not an island. We all must work with the energy companies to try to protect the wintering ranges on the base and beyond as best we can."

Roan Plateau, which sits in the Piceance Basin—where thousands of new gas wells are being installed annually—includes remarkable backcountry and wilderness quality lands, streams that qualify for protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and national park-like beauty, surrounded by Colorado's most active energy development.

Unleased lands along the base of Roan Plateau provide critical wildlife habitat, in an area where impacts to such habitat are increasing rapidly. Three streams atop the plateau include genetically pure strains of Colorado River cutthroat trout. Atop the plateau, one of Colorado's tallest waterfalls crashes into a remote canyon, dubbed by some as 'Colorado's Little Yosemite.' These resources provide long-term benefits to area communities, who have supported protections for the plateau throughout the planning process.

"The trout and wildlife of the Roan Plateau have more long-term value than the gas below it," said John Trammel, a representative of the Grand Valley Trout Unlimited chapter in Grand Junction. His chapter has invested hundreds of volunteer hours doing restoration work atop Roan Plateau in an effort to protect the fragile trout streams. "Keeping it the way it is right now is the right thing to do for wildlife and for those who visit the Roan to fish and hunt. Anything Congressmen Salazar and Udall can do to protect this special place would be greatly appreciated."

Advocates for protection of Roan Plateau have long noted that there is no rush to open Roan Plateau to similar development, given the unprecedented level of drilling activity already occurring.

“What Representatives Salazar and Udall are doing is exactly what almost everyone has been asking for, the chance to really consider how to best protect Roan Plateau,” said Steve Smith with The Wilderness Society. “There should be no rush to lease or drill these lands. The gas will still be there when better technologies exist to protect the area’s critical lands. Plentiful lands are already leased in the region, and many other lands are already available for leasing. Energy development will continue. The only question is will Roan Plateau remain the undeveloped gem it is today?”

After a six year planning process, in September 2006 the Bureau of Land Management released a proposed plan for the Roan Plateau Planning Area—including lands on top and at the base—that would lease the entire area for oil and gas. That proposed plan was the result of meetings among BLM’s cooperating agencies, and was never released for public review and comment. In contrast, throughout the planning process most area governments and thousands of citizens have urged that BLM protect Roan Plateau for its traditional uses and important ecological values.

“John Salazar and Mark Udall deserve credit for doing what is clearly in the public good,” said Clare Bastable, with the Colorado Mountain Club. “Roan Plateau’s public lands provide world-class backcountry recreation and critical wildlife habitat. Local communities and citizens have always urged that we ‘keep the Roan Plateau as it is.’ The public did not have the chance to review and comment on the plan that resulted from the cooperating agency meetings. If they had, based on the history of the campaign, we are confident that they would again urge the strongest protections. Thanks to Salazar and Udall, now they might have that chance.”

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For more information on the Roan Plateau, and the multi-year campaign to save it, please visit [www.SaveRoanPlateau.org](http://www.SaveRoanPlateau.org). For an opportunity to view the Roan Plateau, and area natural gas development, by air call Pete Kolbenslag at 970.261.0678.