

Campaign to Save Roan Plateau

For immediate release: November 23, 2004

Contacts: Lisa Bracken (970) 876-2146; Larry Amos (970) 876-2623; Clare Bastable (970) 618-1341; Steve Smith (970) 945-8596

COMMUNITY LEADERS ASK BLM FOR A BETTER BALANCED ROAN PLATEAU PLAN

DENVER, CO (November 23, 2004) – In response to a draft plan for Colorado’s Roan Plateau that was released last week by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), community leaders today asked the BLM to revise the plan to protect one-third of the area from oil and gas development. The compromise advocated by the leaders would make available 86 percent of the gas likely to be produced from the Roan Plateau area over the next 20 years, while protecting the top of the plateau itself by placing it off limits to oil and gas development.

“Over the past year, a wide range of citizens and local communities have asked BLM to adopt a middle-ground solution that doesn’t open the Plateau’s tops and cliffs to drilling,” said Lisa Bracken, a local landowner and Realtor. “Unfortunately, none of the scenarios proposed last week by the BLM provide the protection that citizens and local communities have asked for. We shouldn’t be asking how far we can push it. We should be asking how lightly we can tread.”

The BLM last Friday released five alternatives for management of oil and gas leasing atop the Roan Plateau. The BLM’s “preferred alternative” is one of three of the five alternatives presented that would open the entire area to oil and gas leasing, but unlike the other two, this one, Alternate III, would defer oil and gas leasing until 80 percent of the anticipated wells beneath the plateau’s cliffs have been drilled. Although the BLM stated that the preferred alternative would defer drilling for roughly 16 years, participants in today’s news conference asserted that 80 percent of the Plateau’s base could be drilled much more quickly.

“Based on current levels of activity, industry will be past the threshold and drilling on top long before even ten years,” said Larry Amos of Winterhawk Outfitters. “Once it’s leased, industry has the right to extract the resource. The result would be hundreds or thousands of wells on top of the Plateau, in one of the state’s most unique recreational areas.”

Roan Plateau, which rises 3,500 feet above the Colorado River valley, is a biologically diverse center for backcountry recreation, hunting and fishing, and critical habitat for some of the purest strains of the imperiled Colorado cutthroat trout. Participants in today’s news event in Rifle, which included local elected officials, a hunting outfitter, a local landowner, and a representative from the Campaign to Save Roan Plateau, emphasized that their proposed plan to the BLM would open to oil and gas development fully two-thirds of the

planning area, and would make available 86 percent of the gas likely to be produced from the Roan Plateau area over the next 20 years, by the BLM's own estimates.

"I'm optimistic that we can protect a special part of this country that my husband considered to be heaven on earth," said Judy Hayward, a concerned local citizen who also sits on the Parachute Town Council. "The oil and gas industry is like a train running at full speed. We need to identify a brake and save a special spot in the world for my children and grandchildren. The BLM's set of alternatives fails to provide adequate protections for these cherished, unique resources."

The participants today asked the BLM to craft a revised plan that would:

- Prohibit drilling the public lands atop the Plateau and on the cliffs or at least defer all leasing on the top and cliffs of the Plateau until energy development can be achieved through directional drilling or other evolving technologies that will not require surface disturbance to the top and cliffs;
- Provide real, non-changeable protections for the important habitat and natural areas in the planning area, including placing permanent "no ground disturbance" stipulations on all the unique natural lands of the planning area;
- Ensure that development is conducted in a manner that respects the local community, employs "Best Management Practices," and minimizes resource damage.

"The community has strongly supported meaningful protections for the public lands atop and on the cliffs of the Plateau, and the BLM should craft a plan that honors what citizens have asked for," said Bracken, the local landowner. "Whatever plan is selected, it must offer strong, and meaningful protections for the lands atop -- and along the scenic cliff faces -- of the Plateau."

At today's event, participants encouraged concerned citizens to contact elected officials and submit comments to BLM.

"We appreciate the BLM's efforts to create a well-considered plan for Roan Plateau, but the agency's current preferred plan just doesn't go far enough to protect this extraordinary place," said Clare Bastable of the Campaign to Save Roan Plateau. "Industry should not be the entity calling the shots about what level of drilling is appropriate, about surface protections, or about drilling the top of the Plateau. Some places are simply too special to drill, and Roan Plateau is one of them."

"Deferred drilling doesn't protect Roan Plateau," said Bob Millette, a representative of the local Trout Unlimited chapter. "It just delays the damage to clean air, water, and habitat."