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Innovative Roan Plan resulted from long, collaborative pr




Guest Column

By **Sally Wisely**

Colorado State Director, Bureau of Land

Management

June 8, 2007

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After nearly seven years of working closely with the public and state and local governments to develop a management plan for the Roan Plateau, the Bureau of Land Management has issued the first of two Records of Decision.

I want to thank everyone who has participated in the long Roan Plateau Planning process: the public, local governments, and especially our formal Cooperating Agencies on this plan — Garfield and Rio Blanco counties, the town of Parachute, cities of Glenwood Springs and Rifle, and the Colorado Department of Natural Resources.

This first Record of Decision, or ROD, covers about 70 percent of the 73,602-acre Roan Planning area in northwestern Colorado. It upholds the key components of the innovative Proposed Roan Plateau Resource Management Plan, which we released last fall.

The ROD is the result of a highly collaborative public planning process that began in 2000. It evolved through public involvement and close coordination with our Cooperating Agencies. The framework on which the plan is built comes from a progressive proposal devised by the Department of Natural Resources.

This significant time and effort produced a truly innovative plan — a plan that provides strong protection for wildlife habitat, scenic views, and ecologically sensitive areas, yet still allows most of the Federal natural gas to be recovered beneath the Roan Plateau Planning Area.

And that gas resource is significant. The federal natural gas resources under the Roan Planning Area are estimated to be able to heat 4 million homes for 20 years.

In fact, the Roan was originally set aside as Naval Oil Shale Reserves 1 and 3 because of its rich energy resources. These mineral reserves were transferred from the Department of Energy to BLM in 1997 through an act of Congress. That Act specifically directed BLM to lease the lands in both reserves for the exploration, development, and production of petroleum resources as soon as practicable. That direction clearly includes the top of the Roan.

The Roan also holds other important resources — genetically pure Colorado River cutthroat trout, water resources, and scenic views. From the very start of this effort, BLM has planned to protect these resources while meeting the specific Congressional direction to lease the area for oil and gas — and to manage for multiple uses.

BLM will tightly control the oil and gas development on the top of the Roan through such requirements as limiting the ground disturbance to approximately one percent of the land at any one time, requiring drill pads to be one-half mile apart, and allowing development activities on only one ridge at a time.

The first ROD does not cover the 21,034 acres proposed as “Areas of Critical Environmental Concern” in the Proposed Plan. One of the 42 protests we received on the Proposed Plan last fall identified a violation that required our availability notice to include very specific information on the ACECs. While we did see many comments on the ACECs, to fix this technical error, BLM is holding a 60-day public comment period on the proposed ACECs. A second ROD will be issued following analysis of the comments received.

Virtually all of the land in the proposed ACECs would be managed under no surface occupancy stipulations.

means no surface disturbance is allowed. When added to the additional 17,336 acres with the same restriction in the first ROD, more than 50 percent of the planning area would be stipulated no surface occupancy.

We are proud of this plan developed through a highly collaborative and public process, and is based mainly on an innovative approach to resource protection and development proposed by the State of Colorado. It follows Congressional direction and allows critical energy resources to be accessed.

For more information about the ACEC comment period or the plan decisions, log on to <http://www.blm.gov/rmp/co/roanplateau>.

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