

Salazar presses Interior on Roan drilling

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Washington — Sen. Ken Salazar demanded today that Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne detail in writing how the federal government will address Colorado's concerns about a plan to allow more oil and gas drilling atop the Roan Plateau.

Salazar, D-Colo., met with Kempthorne today as part of the senator's ongoing skirmish with Interior and the Bureau of Land Management over new drilling on the plateau. Salazar has placed a hold on Senate confirmation of President Bush's nominee to head the BLM, James Caswell.

"I said that we are essentially heading to a point of collision with the federal government" and with BLM, Salazar said. "I told him it was up to him to help avoid that train wreck."

Kempthorne's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Salazar said he told Kempthorne he would make a decision about lifting that hold after seeing the letter requested of Kempthorne.

Salazar also conceded, however that Bush could install Caswell without Senate confirmation during the Senate's planned recess next month.

The Roan Plateau in northwestern Colorado has become a battleground for environmentalists, hunters, recreation lovers and those who argue that retrieving stores of energy in the mountain is essential to meeting the nation's energy needs. Money from drilling leases — estimated at between \$500 million and \$1 billion — would partly go to the state. The revenue would be split 50-50 between the state and federal governments.

Gov. Bill Ritter wants 120 days to review the BLM's Roan Plateau drilling plan. The agency gave him less than 30 days.

Salazar said he wants Kempthorne to give Ritter more time as well as answer questions about technology that could allow oil and gas retrieval without drilling on the top. There are technologies that allow for vertical drilling, retrieving the energy sources from lower down on the 9,000-foot mountain.