

For Immediate Release

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Roan Plateau comments again overwhelmingly favor protection **Almost 100% of public comments support strong ACEC protections**

WEST GLENWOOD- Almost 42,000 people commented on the Bureau of Land Management's proposal to allow leasing and drilling in the most ecologically important lands on the Roan Plateau and they delivered a nearly unanimous message: Don't.

Of the total comments received by the BLM during its most recent comment period on the Roan's 'Areas of Critical Environmental Concern' (or 'ACECs') over 99% urged that these lands not be opened to drilling and energy development. Response from Colorado also strongly favored protection (>95%).

"How much more unanimous does the public have to be?" asked Brian Bernhardt, with the Campaign to Save Roan Plateau. "Industry already has a huge backlog of drilling opportunities. This rush to lease and drill even the Roan's most sensitive places is reckless and irresponsible. If we wait, directional drilling will let us tap much of the gas while protecting the Roan's wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities."

In June 2007 BLM issued a decision on most of the Roan's public lands to lease them for mineral development. However the BLM postponed a decision for potential ACECs and held another public comment period. Like the other public lands in the planning area, the BLM's proposal is to open even the Roan's most sensitive places to oil and gas leasing and drilling, with some additional restrictions that could be waived at agency planners' discretion.

In 2002 the BLM found some 40,000 acres of the Roan Plateau's public lands eligible for protection as ACECs. The Colorado Division of Wildlife recommended to BLM that no drilling occur inside these sensitive watersheds and habitat lands. This was also the BLM's recommendation – initially. But under pressure from industry and from Washington, agency planners whittled the ACECs down by almost half, and then proposed letting industry drill within their boundaries anyway.

In the comments it submitted to BLM, Colorado Division of Wildlife officials objected to the downsizing the critical area designations and failure to adopt no surface occupancy requirements within their borders.

"The CDOW compromised heavily in agreeing to the small ACEC's in the final [proposed] plan," wrote Ron Velarde, the DOW's Northwest Regional Manager, in comments sent to BLM. "We believed at the time of the draft plan, and still believe today, that the ACECs ... should be fully protected as ACECs with No Surface Occupancy stipulations. Because we were told that the large ACEC's would not be accepted by the Washington staff, the DOW agreed to compromise on smaller ACEC's. It is concerning that these smaller ACEC's could be altered further based on additional public comment. Without these very minimum ACEC's, we can say that the plan will jeopardize the Roan Plateau's important wildlife habitat."

Other of the BLM's cooperating agencies—including The City of Rifle in previous comments submitted to the BLM—also supported the larger ACECs."

The ACEC comment period closed in August. A recent review of the comments collected at the BLM's Glenwood Springs Field Office found 41,900 were received. *All but seven* responses supported the protection of these lands from energy development. Of these seven pro-drilling comments, three were from a single industry group—the Independent Petroleum Association of Mountain States.

“The Roan Plateau’s lands are owned by citizens throughout Colorado and the nation who time and again have shown overwhelming support for the Roan’s protection,” said Bob Millette, who submitted comments on behalf of the local Roaring Fork Sierra Club group. “Only the oil and gas companies think it’s a good idea to drill these lands, but they pull the strings with the BLM. If the agency won’t act in the public’s interest then our senators and governor should: now is the time to protect the Roan Plateau for good.”

The comment review was conducted by Brian Bernhardt and Pete Kolbenschlag with the Campaign to Save Roan Plateau on November 16.

“In reviewing the comments there really were no surprises,” said Pete Kolbenschlag. “As with every other Roan comment period there isn’t any question—Coloradans and Americans everywhere favor protection over drilling the last of the Roan’s public lands.”

Roan advocates believe that Colorado has its best opportunity yet to ensure that the Roan’s important habitat and watersheds are properly managed, and that its remaining undeveloped public lands stay as they are today, for recreation, secure wildlife areas, grazing lands, and open space. This summer the U.S. House of Representatives passed energy legislation that would protect the public lands atop Roan Plateau. Action is still pending in the full Congress. In Colorado, Governor Ritter is scheduled to complete a review of the BLM’s proposed plan by mid-December. Since the BLM has yet to issue a decision on the Roan’s most sensitive lands, the Governor’s position could be particularly important in protecting all the area’s important wildlife habitat and sensitive watershed lands.

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Some other comment excerpts-

“My family owns a cattle grazing permit on the Roan Plateau. ...Considering the historical record, and reputation that the oil and gas companies in this area have for management of traffic and maintaining good road conditions, it would literally be a disaster for them to develop oil and gas operations on the Roan Plateau. ...The Roan Plateau should definitely not be developed from the top of the plateau, now or in the future, for oil and gas. ...Surely we can exempt the Roan Plateau, one of the few remaining pristine locations.”

“The City of Steamboat Springs was very disappointed in the Bureau of Land Management’s decision to proceed with oil and gas leasing on the Roan Plateau. ...We ask that both the Roan Plateau and Vermillion Basin be spared from oil and gas leasing for the immediate future. They are two of the best examples of large contiguous federally owned parcels that display characteristics of diverse wildlife habitat and currently protect traditional uses like agriculture, hunting, fishing, and camping. Please prioritize federal lands and save the most special ones until last for production. ...Soon it may be possible to extract the mineral resources directionally and not set foot on these parcels. There is already over 4 million acres of federally leased land and three million of that is not currently in production. There is no shortage of land available for production.”