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### Senator undecided on barring Roan leases



Wednesday, August 08, 2007

Sen. Ken Salazar, D-Colo., will not immediately commit to supporting a provision in the House energy bill barring oil and gas development on the surface of the Roan Plateau following the bill's passage in the House.

The provision was sponsored by Salazar's brother, Rep. John Salazar, D-Colo.

Meanwhile, Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., announced his intention to oppose the House version of the energy bill, which was passed Saturday. The Senate approved its version without a Roan Plateau provision earlier this year.

The final version likely will be ironed out in conference committee late in the fall.

Sen. Salazar, who last week won Gov. Bill Ritter 120 days to review the management plan for the Roan Plateau before the Bureau of Land Management begins leasing there, has not finished reviewing the Roan Plateau provision of the House bill and hasn't decided if he will push for its inclusion in the final bill, spokesman Cody Wertz said.

"Sen. Salazar certainly believes that the Roan Plateau is a pristine crown jewel of Colorado," Wertz said, "but before moving forward on any proposal or next steps, Sen. Salazar would need to review that proposal."

If passed, the provision would apply "no surface occupancy" requirements to public land atop of the plateau, forcing energy companies to drill indirectly from private land in order to access the Roan's minerals.

When the provision reaches committee, Allard will vigorously oppose the House version of the energy bill partly because of the Roan provision and because he believes it is "a vehicle to increase taxes," spokesman Steve Wymer said.

Wymer said Allard wants to support the years-long public process leading to the BLM's Roan Plateau management plan amendment, which allows restricted drilling on the top of the plateau.

The House bill partly nullified that process because it prevents any drilling on the surface of the plateau.

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