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## **Wildlife, recreation, and conservation groups file protests on Roan Plateau plan**

Organizations oppose single use management for popular hunting and recreation lands

Over a dozen groups today filed protests on the Bureau of Land Management's proposed plan for Roan Plateau, a popular and ecologically sensitive area of public lands in Colorado's Garfield County. Roan Plateau has been the subject of a six-year planning process in which the dominant sentiment expressed has been to keep Roan Plateau as it is—a Mecca for hunting, fishing, and backcountry enthusiasts.

Groups filing protests include the Colorado Wildlife Federation, National Wildlife Federation, Colorado Trout Unlimited, Colorado Mule Deer Association, Colorado Mountain Club, Colorado Environmental Coalition, The Wilderness Society, Sierra Club, Western Colorado Congress, Wilderness Workshop, Center for Native Ecosystems, Environment Colorado, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Rock the Earth. Although filing several protests they raise a common theme: that oil and gas development is being facilitated at the expense of traditional uses and will degrade the area's many important natural resources.

More specifically the protests assert that the proposed plan:

- Threatens the rare and pure strains of Colorado River cutthroat trout;
- Degrades the area's important wilderness characteristics;
- Jeopardizes the area's wildlife;
- Fails to fully disclose impacts from oil and gas drilling or the likely level of development;
- Forces other use to adapt to drilling and would destroy much of the area's backcountry, displacing guides and outfitters and potentially closing much of the area to hunting.

In addition, the final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) accompanying the proposed plan has failed to properly analyze a full range of alternatives, violates BLM's multiple use mandate by managing for a single use, and has introduced substantially new directives never before considered by the public.

While comments on the draft management plan overwhelmingly supported protection of Roan Plateau's important backcountry and urged protection of the top for public uses, the proposed plan would force these uses to adapt to oil and gas development, eventually forcing them off of much of these public lands.

"BLM has decided that it will offer no specific mitigation to protect Roan Plateau's unique recreational opportunities," said Clare Bastable with the Colorado Mountain Club, a 10,000 member recreation and conservation organization. "Roan Plateau provides incredible recreation lands that are important to local communities. But BLM has shaped a plan that places oil and gas development over all these other uses of this popular landscape. BLM should do better."

The final Environmental Impact Statement notes, for instance, that:

Although public comments on the [draft Environmental Impact Statement] indicated a demand for undeveloped recreation settings, BLM has concluded that management to accommodate substantial oil and gas development precludes maintaining characteristics specific to undeveloped recreation settings.

The Colorado Mountain Club is joining with eight other conservation groups in filing a single protest, represented by Western Resource Advocates. This protest asserts that the FEIS understates the level of likely impacts; that it has failed to properly consider BLM findings from a wilderness inventory; and, that the FEIS did not take the requisite "hard look" at impacts and would result in undue harm to area resources, including its recreation and wilderness quality lands, sensitive species, air quality, and habitat.

Wildlife groups also filed protests, including the Colorado Wildlife Federation and National Wildlife Federation, Colorado Trout Unlimited, and the Colorado Mule Deer Association. Like the groups represented by Western Resource Advocates, these groups have long supported carefully managed drilling at the base while keeping the Plateau's top undeveloped and open to other public uses.

The Colorado Mule Deer Association comments on the draft plan also recommended a set of guidelines to better mitigate impacts should drilling atop the Plateau occur. Although the wildlife groups' protests praise certain innovative features in the proposed plan, derived from the Mule Deer Association's guidelines, they conclude that overall it is likely to lead to the loss of much of the area's big game habitat and harm to native trout. Important portions of the guidelines were left out of the proposed plan, and as a result it does not offer the protections these lands warrant. The Colorado Mule Deer Association protest states that the proposed plan "has so many loop holes and escape clauses that it is meaningless."

Protests also note the overwhelming and long-held community support for protecting Roan Plateau. In August and September 2006, as BLM was preparing to release its proposed plan, municipalities in Garfield County passed their third set of resolutions urging BLM to protect these lands, a position endorsed by 98.5% of comments received on the draft plan. Since release of the plan, local governments are again urging that BLM fully consider a management plan that properly protects Roan Plateau, joining the wildlife, recreation, and conservation groups—along with U.S. Senator Ken Salazar and Representative Diana DeGette—in calling for a new public comment period before BLM issues a decision.

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*For Roan Plateau fact sheets, documents, media archive, maps, photographs and more...*

Or call Joe Neuhof at 970-243-0002

Members of the media interested in an over flight of Roan Plateau, should email [MountainWestStrategies@tds.net](mailto:MountainWestStrategies@tds.net) or call Pete Kolbensschlag at 970-261-0678