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Congressmen right to protect special Western Slope places

Editor:

As a veteran, I feel strongly connected to the land I fought to protect.

Right now, there is growing widespread concern across the Western Slope that our principles and way of life are being threatened by federal policies that could harm unique places like the Roan Plateau.

I applaud Rep. John Salazar for standing up for our shared values by advocating a common-sense solution to protect the Roan. The effort by Rep. Salazar, in cooperation with Rep. Mark Udall, to delay leasing on the top of the Roan for a year is commendable.

There are certain places that demand safeguarding, and that's why so many city councils, mayors, experts, conservationists and sportsmen make their voices heard. One industry should not silence them.

Let's all hope that we can continue a fight for our conservation values that have united people of all political parties and persuasions.

ROGER HAGERTY *Grand Junction*

There is no pressing reason to lease Roan immediately

Editor:

I write to commend Reps. John Salazar and Mark Udall on their recent initiative to withhold funding to the BLM for any natural-gas leasing activity on the upper Roan Plateau and urge other members of the congressional delegation from Colorado to assist in this effort.

I recently participated in the review of the environmental impact statement and the collaborative review process for the Roan as Garfield County's long-range planner. The collaboration process was a positive effort by all concerned, and the BLM, state agencies and the counties and municipalities in western Colorado deserve high praise for that effort.

That process resulted in some ground breaking findings on ways to best drill for natural gas deposits in sensitive areas.

While the BLM should be credited with a genuine and honest effort to mitigate the impacts of natural gas drilling on the Roan Plateau, it would never back off on the timing question.

Two aspects to the timing question are critical. First, how much should federal leasing policy fuel a “boom and bust” economy in rural areas? Secondly, at what point does the BLM pay attention to the requirements for sustainable land use in NEPA and its own regulations?

These issues were given short shrift in the BLM’s environmental analysis. High-level BLM staff insisted that the congressional transfer act which gave the BLM control over what was the Navel Oil Shale Reserve somehow demanded that everything ought to be leased now, despite language in that act that required compliance with NEPA.

The resulting environmental analyses refused to look seriously at cumulative impacts from the BLM’s own leasing policies and private development of natural gas reserves in the region.

Gas leases, once granted, aren’t subject to much ongoing public or agency review when it comes to timing or off-site impacts. They need to be granted with caution.

The BLM’s policy should reflect sustainability issues and honor its own language. Until then, Colorado’s congressional representatives should hold the agency’s feet to the fire on this one and prevent any immediate leasing of the top of the Roan Plateau.

RANDY RUSSELL