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## Officials: Move s

### Ritter, Salazar say more tim

By Ellen Miller, Special to the Rocky July 4, 2007

RIFLE - Gov. Bill Ritter and U.S. Sen. K Salazar toured northwestern Colorado helicopter Tuesday, then renewed their for Washington to slow its rush to drill th Roan Plateau.

"I don't believe there should be oil and drilling on top of the Roan, but the BLM (Bureau of Land Management) made the decision, so now it's for the governor to protect what we have," Salazar said. "We can't have the philosophy of taking gas from under every rock."

In June, the federal government opened up the top of the scenic plateau for drilling as early as next year, ignoring protests from conservationists and locking horns with Colorado lawmakers.

The decision covers 70 percent of the Roan's top, about 73,602 acres. It allows restricted drilling to reduce footprints on the land and protect rare fish and wildlife habitats.

Ritter asked the federal government to wait 120 days before implementing the drilling plan. So far, the BLM has refused.

The BLM's decision to drill was made before Ritter took office, so the agency acted on analysis and comment provided by former Gov. Bill Owens, a Republican.

"There's a lot we don't know (about the plan)," Ritter said. "We just started with a modest request for a new administration and we were turned down."

For nearly three hours Tuesday, Ritter and Salazar viewed northwestern Colorado's massive gas drilling from the air. They also saw the undeveloped portion of the Roan Plateau north of Rifle and the Vermillion Basin and Little Snake Basin, both near Colorado's northern border.

"Coming back over the Roan, the developing private lands and undeveloped public land, it's quite a contrast," Ritter said. "It was really a great opportunity to see this area and see the recent impacts and the long-term impacts."

He referred to the booming drilling of private and much public land in Garfield, Rio Blanco and Moffat counties, where the landscape is scarred by drill pads and service roads, in contrast to the Roan's deep canyons, glistening waterfalls, trout streams and abundant deer.

Jim Sample, a spokesman for BLM's Colorado office, said state BLM Director Sally Wisely has had several "cordial and informational" discussions with Harris Sherman, chief of Colorado's Department of Natural Resources, about the Roan and other energy issues.

Sample said Ritter's request for more time to review the plan is being handled out of the BLM's Washington office. "It's not in our

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## Roan

### ss drilling



Matt McClain © The Rocky

A drilling rig rests on the Roan Plateau on Tuesday outside Rifle. The federal government opened the top of the plateau to oil and gas drilling as early as next year. Gov. Bill Ritter says that's too soon.

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hands at this point, and it never was."

Colorado has had ample time to review the plan during the seven years it has been developed. BLM's acting director, Jim Hughes, has said.

Ritter called Colorado's natural resources an asset, but said they should be developed with their impacts in mind and using advances in technology. He cited directional drilling, where the surface of a "special place" such as the Roan might be drilled from drill pads outside the immediate area.

Salazar said he would use "every means I have at my disposal" to back Ritter's request. He has already placed a hold on President Bush's nomination of James Caswell to head the BLM in an effort to pressure Interior Secretary Dick Kempthorne to grant Colorado more time.

"We need to look 50 or 100 years down the road," Salazar said.

*Staff writer Todd Hartman contributed to this report.*

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