

BLM turns deaf ear to pleas  
Roan development at crux of dispute to protect public lands



By DAVE BUCHANAN The Daily Sentinel

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P.S., bugger off. That, figuratively speaking, is how Bureau of Land Management responded last week to a letter from Gov. Bill Ritter asking the agency to hold off on its wide-scale development of the Roan Plateau.

“The citizens of this state are concerned about the management of our public lands, (and) the scale and pace of energy development,” wrote Ritter to U.S. Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne.

But, ho hum, little good it did.

Kempthorne, who one might assume is making at least some of the decisions since his boss doesn't seem to be paying attention to much of anything, has the director of the BLM lie to us and say the Naval Oils Shale Reserve statute calls for expedited development of the Roan's energy resources.

That's a crock and the BLM and the environmental community know it.

But that's the gummint's story and it's sticking to it.

And then, we hear from one Mark W. Smith, executive director of IPAMS, the Independent Petroleum Association of Mountain States (you think this guy has a vested interest in more drilling?), who claims members of Congress wanting to slow the out-of-control leasing and drilling on public lands in western states are taking the wrong action.

“One has to wonder why Members (sic) of Congress would vote for legislation that will decrease domestic supplies of oil and natural gas at a time when consumers are already suffering from high prices,” said Smith, forgetting that oil companies are reporting record profits, none of which is headed for rebates to the people paying those high prices.

Well, maybe we'd slow that drilling because we're willing to drive our big ol' gas-hog trucks a little less in order to ensure our children and grandchildren can enjoy what we take for granted.

But, hey, that's just a wild guess.

Of course, this “more is better” attitude isn't anything new from the Bushies and their apologists, who consider “conservation” a four-letter word.

Ritter also mentions in his letter that 98 percent of the more than 75,000 comments collected by the BLM about the Roan Plateau asked the BLM not to drill on top of the plateau.

Of course the BLM thumbed its nose at this, and IPAMS' Smith goes on record to complain "Coloradans don't want activists from Boston and San Francisco deciding what's best for our state."

Apparently Smith regards anyone who takes an interest how the public's land is being managed as an "activist."

I wonder if that's his fear-pandering code word for "environmentalist" or "tree-hugger"?

Smith and others like him forget the Roan Plateau, the Piceance Basin and yes, the Jonah Basin in Wyoming, which by now has been royally messed up by the energy companies, are public lands, which mean they belong to the public, which might come as a surprise but includes those "activists" in Boston, San Francisco, Portland (Maine and Oregon) and anywhere in this wonderful country.

The energy companies know they have about 18 more months in this rush-to-drill before their circus gets shut down, shortly after the Bush administration has to look for other work.

Until then, it's great to have local faces and names protesting what happens to the Western Slope, its wildlife, fisheries and other natural resources, but this isn't just a local problem.

Besides, you can't have it both ways.

You can't have a name like "Association of Mountain States" and pretend to speak only for Colorado's interests. Likewise, you can't make Swiss cheese of public lands and not expect the "public" to take a stand.

And since we're on a roll about managing public lands, we need to respond to a phone call we received after Sunday's column about the impacts of energy development on wildlife and related activities in the Piceance Basin.

When the Division of Wildlife purchased the Bosque del Oso Wildlife Area in south-central Colorado, the purchase was made with the knowledge the state was buying the land but not the gas trapped underneath.

It comes as no surprise (although that doesn't mean it's welcome) that the frantic pace of energy development has laced the Bosque with roads and drill sites. That was part of the devil's bargain the DOW was willing to accept in order to open the area to the public.

However, when it comes to the Piceance Basin and the state lands recently traded to a couple of energy companies, it's a different ballgame.

Those lands, too, originally were purchased by the DOW with money from licenses bought by hunters and anglers.

At the time, nobody expected the day would come when so much energy activity would occur around and under the Piceance lands that those parcels would lose their value as wildlife habitat.

However, when that day finally came, the DOW already was protesting the speed and lack of diligent monitoring undertaken by the BLM (Motto: Multiple-use means vertical and directional drilling) in it's hurry to lease energy rights in the Piceance.

As has been the case across the West, state wildlife and fisheries biologists were ignored when it comes to questioning preconceived decisions, and now areas that maybe you or someone you know once hunted or fished are well pads or soon-to-be-well pads on private land.

So if you want to protest what's happening to your public lands, write to the BLM, not the DOW.

Of course, better put a local return address on that letter or you might get called an "activist."