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State gets time to review Roan plan

By Denver Post Staff

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Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne has agreed to give state officials more time to comment on the Bureau of Land Management's plan to allow drilling on Colorado's Roan Plateau, Sen. Ken Salazar announced today.

The Colorado Democrat said he would lift his "hold" on BLM Director nominee James Caswell after Kempthorne agreed to his request for a 120-day extension of time for the state review and comment on the Resource Management Plan for the Roan Plateau.

"This is an important first step in working towards a cooperative relationship between the State of Colorado, the BLM and the Interior Department with respect to how we move forward on the Roan Plateau and responsible oil shale development and oil and gas leasing issues," Salazar said in a release.

"Secretary Kempthorne gave me his commitment that the BLM will respond in good faith to the comments and concerns raised during the review period and address them."

Salazar's block of Caswell's appointment was a last-ditch attempt to provide more time to comment on the plan.

Salazar - along with Democratic Reps. Mark Udall and John Salazar - took up the cause of Gov. Bill Ritter, a Democrat.

Ritter came into office as the BLM was finalizing its Roan plan, which was based on one shaped by then-Gov. Bill Owens' administration. Ritter wanted 120 days to review that plan. The agency had set a timetable that allowed less than 30 days for comment.

"We're going to take this time to carefully and thoughtfully review all of the issues and we take the federal government at its word that it will give serious consideration to any issues that we raise," said Evan Dreyer, a spokesman for Gov. Ritter.

After seven years of study, hearings and comment from state agencies, the Colorado office of the Bureau of Land Management finalized a plan in June that authorizes up to 1,570 new natural-gas wells on and around the Roan Plateau over 20 years.

It projects up to 13 well pads and 210 wells on top of the Roan.

The landmark 180 miles west of Denver contains large reserves of natural gas and oil shale and is home to some of the state's largest deer and elk herds, mountain lions, bears, peregrine falcons, rare plants and a genetically distinct strain of cutthroat trout.

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