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'We don't need to be gluttons' for gas

Colorado political heavyweights seek to delay drilling on Western Slope

Dennis Webb
Vail, CO Colorado
July 7, 2007

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GLENWOOD SPRINGS — With as many as 5,000 wells already drilled in northwest Colorado and another 55,000 looming, two of Colorado's top elected officials are questioning the rush to pursue natural gas drilling in unique landscapes such as the Roan Plateau. Gov. Bill Ritter and U.S. Sen. Ken Salazar, both Democrats, got a bird's-eye view of northwest Colorado's dramatic landscapes and intensive energy development Tuesday morning. The two also touched down in Moffat County's Vermillion Basin, another area of controversy when it comes to energy development on federal lands.

In a press conference afterward at the Garfield County Regional Airport, Salazar said some 4,000 to 5,000 natural gas wells already have been drilled in northwest Colorado, and a total of 60,000 eventually may be drilled in the region.

With so much development coming, it shouldn't be a problem for the federal government to honor Ritter's request for 120 days to review the Bureau of Land Management's plans for drilling on the Roan Plateau, Salazar said.

An opponent of drilling on top of the plateau, Salazar said he recognizes that the Bureau of Land Management has decided to allow gas development there and elsewhere in the region.

"But as it moves forward with leasing of those areas it is a perfectly reasonable thing for the governor of this state to want to make sure that we don't destrc resources, our sustainability, along the way," he said.

The land bureau worked with the state in developing its Roan Plateau plan, but Ritter took office this new administration should be given a chance to offer input. The federal government denied that requ

Ritter said he never has come out in opposition to drilling on the Roan, but it is one of the last places should be allowed to occur. He is hoping that directional drilling eventually might allow developer without well pads having to be placed on the plateau top.

Like Salazar, Ritter questioned the federal government's push for more drilling in a region where so occurring.

"We don't need to be gluttons about this. We need to be thoughtful and prudent about how we go ab extraction, and we need to consider the air, water, wildlife as other resources that compete," Ritter sa

Salazar said he would use every means at his disposal to try to persuade the Interior Department to g request for more time. Already, he has placed a Senate "hold" on President Bush's nomination of Jar

Gov. Bill Ritter, left, and U.S. Sen. Ken Salazar answer questions at the Garfield County Airport after taking a helicopter flight over the Roan Plateau.



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the new Bureau of Land Management director until Interior Secretary Kirk Kempthorne agrees to the Salazar said he plans to further press his case in an upcoming meeting with Kempthorne.

In a news release by state Senate Republicans, state Sen. Josh Penry of Fruita said Ritter and Salazar “Democratic election politics” rather than developing any constructive alternative for managing the F

He noted that the current Roan plan is based in large part on a state proposal crafted under the leader: resident Russell George, who was director of the state Department of Natural Resources under previc Owens.

George, a Republican, is now Ritter’s transportation director. Penry called George’s proposal “the m environmentally minded production plan in the history of the American West.”

Mary Ellen Denomy, a petroleum accountant who attended Tuesday’s press conference, said that anc slow down is that the region lacks sufficient gas pipelines serving other markets. That means local pr having to sell for less than the national average, which reduces state and local government revenues.

Environmental groups including Trout Unlimited released a poll Tuesday that they said shows nearly voters in Colorado’s 3rd Congressional District, which includes western Colorado, oppose any more Roan. Another half, including 47 percent of Republicans, want further drilling restricted to existing s the groups said.

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