

Citizens' Campaign to Save Roan Plateau  
www.SaveRoanPlateau.org

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## 86% of Plateau's natural gas available without drilling top Citizens renew push for even-handed Roan Plateau plan

According to figures compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), over 86% of the natural gas reserves expected to be developed during the life of the pending plan are available without drilling on the Roan Plateau's pristine top. The BLM figures are found in the agency's Reasonable Foreseeable Development (RFD) scenario.

A nearly unanimous consensus—including every municipal government in Garfield County where the Plateau is located and more than 12,000 citizen comments—has urged the BLM to adopt a plan that would allow drilling at the base but would protect the undeveloped public lands on top.

"The issue was never to drill or not to drill, no matter what industry might say. The only question is will these public lands be managed for a single industry or for the broader community," stated Pete Kolbenschlager with the Colorado Environmental Coalition.

The widely supported plan would have allowed drilling on about 33,000 acres of public lands while protecting about 40,000 acres for other uses and values. With little explanation the BLM removed this popularly supported plan from further consideration. Disappointed but undeterred, local residents and citizens from across the state and nation have vowed to continue their effort to save Roan Plateau.

"Reasonable amounts of drilling are OK but drilling everything is not. Our dramatic and undeveloped landscapes are what residents and visitors cherish about Western Colorado. Industry insiders predict 10,000 wells in the county within a couple of decades. Quite frankly, such activity will kill the golden goose. We need balance, and Roan Plateau is where we are going to demand it," said Peggy Utesch of Parachute with the Grand Valley Citizens' Alliance.

According to the document, the RFD outlines "the level of oil and gas development activity that an objective reviewer might reasonably expect to occur over a specified range of time." Previous RFDs have been "consistently low," and the level of drilling has regularly outpaced agency projections and planning. About half the Roan Plateau area is already owned or leased by industry and throughout the region 94% of the gas reserves are available from public lands open to development.

According to the RFD, of the estimated 3,916 billion cubic feet (bcf) of natural gas projected for development from the planning area over the next twenty years—the approximate planning horizon--the vast majority at 3,382 bcf, is accessible without leasing or drilling lands on top. If drilling were prohibited on only the public lands atop the Plateau, 3,563 bcf of the resource (91%) would remain accessible, BLM's figures show.

"According to their own documents, BLM confirms that the majority of the resource is available from drilling at the base and leaving the critical wildlife habitat and undeveloped public lands on top alone." Said Steve Smith of Glenwood Springs.

"This is truly a place where we can save our cake and eat it too. But the industry and their Washington DC friends aren't interested in this even-handed approach. Rather, industry behaves as if they are entitled to whatever they can get from the Roan Plateau. On the other hand, the agency is well aware of what the public wants. It is up to the BLM to select a fair-minded plan."

The plan is controversial because of what is at stake. Massive energy development atop the Plateau is likely to have severe impacts on other public uses and values. Draft comments from Colorado Division of Wildlife staff, which estimated that hunting in the Roan Plateau planning area is worth nearly \$4 million annually to Garfield County, noted that wide scale development—as envisioned by the RFD—would decimate wildlife habitat and populations on the Plateau.

"Nearly everyone—local governments, editorial boards, and thousands of Americans—have supported a single vision for the Plateau: drill at the base, get the natural gas that way but manage the public lands atop the Plateau for other uses," said Clare Bastable of the Colorado Mountain Club in Carbondale.

"The undeveloped lands of the Roan Plateau enhance our quality-of-life and bring in revenue year after year. Unlike this drilling boom, revenue flowing from our open public lands will not play out and bust. Hunting alone on the Plateau is worth nearly \$80 million over twenty years. BLM needs to provide for a balance, the whole place shouldn't be a gas field."

Although the Bush Administration has pledged to listen to communities and citizens in shaping public lands policy, many fear that this holds true only when industry agrees.

To many it seems that any efforts by BLM to craft a truly balanced, community-supported, long-term vision for these unique public lands have been stymied in the rush to drill anywhere that profits might be had. Meanwhile the public is left mostly in the dark and with a growing impression that drilling is the only priority for the Roan Plateau.

The RFD is a case in point. Although it is a signed and dated document, BLM has refused to release it. However, BLM shared the document with several state and local agencies, where it was obtainable under Colorado's open records laws.

"The public should know what plans are afoot for our public lands. Public agencies should manage public minerals and lands in the public interest, which requires openness and upfront decision making," Kolbenschlag, who filed the request, continued.

"Although many folks are left questioning just whose interests are being served, we remain hopeful that BLM will do the right thing. For now, we are waiting, like everyone else."

After a string of delays, BLM is currently estimating the draft plan will be released in early 2004 with a 90-day public comment period to follow. Open houses and public hearings are also likely.

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For the latest information and an extensive archive of previous articles, government documents (including BLM's RFD) and other supporting material, including high quality photos, maps and video, please visit [www.SaveRoanPlateau.org](http://www.SaveRoanPlateau.org)