

Campaign to Save Roan Plateau

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 9, 2004

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Garfield County Businesses Support Balanced Roan Plateau Plan News conference speakers call on County to send message to BLM

GLENWOOD SPRINGS—The undeveloped public lands of the Roan Plateau provide important benefits for the local economy and need to be protected, noted speakers today at a noon press conference in front of the Garfield County Courthouse. Addressing media during the lunch break of the regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners, local business owners called on the Board to support an even-handed plan for the Roan Plateau.

In introducing the conference speakers, Steve Smith of Glenwood Springs showed a letter signed by local businesses, which was to be submitted that afternoon to the Board of County Commissioners.

“The letter thanks the commissioners for their interest and involvement, and asks the Board to support a plan that keeps all drilling at the base and off the top of the Plateau,” Smith said.

Garfield County is a cooperating agency with the Bureau of Land Management in developing a draft plan for the management of Roan Plateau’s public lands. The Board of County Commissioners has already offered input to BLM during two earlier comment periods, and has indicated its preference for keeping the top of the Roan Plateau in its natural state. For many local businesses this even-handed approach makes sound fiscal sense.

“Hunting alone on the Roan Plateau is worth almost \$4 million annually to Garfield County,” said Scott Bryndilson, owner of B&B Plumbing in Rifle and a large ranch south of the city. “But that’s only the start. Safeguarding our dramatic landscape and protecting recreational choice are cornerstones to growing a healthy economy. People in Garfield County want to keep the Roan Plateau as it is, with no drilling on top or on the cliff faces. That is because we recognize the importance of this undeveloped island of public land to our way of life.”

The Board has indicated that public hearings will be held once the BLM releases the draft for a 90-day public comment period. Over a year behind, delays in Washington DC continue to hold up the plan’s release. Today’s speakers stressed that the Board should carefully consider the impacts to local livelihoods and economies once the draft plan becomes available for public review.

“The commissioners need to take into account what will best nourish our economy in the long term,” said Duke Cox, owner of Escalante Builders a local developer specializing in green-building techniques. “Putting all our eggs in the energy basket is not a sound business strategy. The Board should stand with us to support an even-handed plan for the Roan Plateau.”

Last year a record number of wells were drilled in Garfield County and the state predicts that the number drilled this year will surpass that again. Meanwhile, the two largest operators in the county, Williams Companies of Oklahoma and Canadian energy giant EnCana, are enjoying explosive revenues, according to various market reports.

“Industry calls it the Persian Gulf of gas. That might sound good to them, but it doesn’t sound like a place people will want to come visit or retire to, or a place where new businesses will want to come to stay,” said Dean Moffat of Sundesigns Architects and Planners. “It’s all about striking a balance. The county needs to be supporting the people and businesses who are already part of the community and who want to remain for the long haul. The industry doesn’t need any more help, they’re already making lots of money and drilling as fast as they can.”

According to staff from the Colorado Oil and Gas Association—an industry trade group—Garfield County is likely to see 10,000 new wells over the next few decades, more than exist in Saudi Arabia and Iran combined. With such wide scale energy development a certain part of the county’s future, protection of the Roan Plateau for other public uses makes solid business sense, speakers argued.

“Most of the natural gas in the region is already available and being drilled at record rates,” noted Smith in wrapping up the news conference. “Municipal governments, local businesses, hunters and recreationists, newspapers and conservation organizations all agree: the Roan Plateau is some place special, a place worth safeguarding for our children and our own quality-of-life. It’s time for BLM and the Bush Administration to get the message too, and we’re calling on the county to help us deliver it.”

BLM figures show that by drilling from the base, and keeping the top of the Roan Plateau undeveloped, industry can still extract most of the natural gas in the planning area. Nearly 90% of the natural gas BLM expects to develop while the plan is in effect can be reached without drilling on top of the Plateau, documents show.

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