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CONTACT

Randy Corry, Silt Town Council
970-945-8205

Dan Richardson, Glenwood Springs City Council
970-928-0141

Jane Hines, Grand Valley Citizens Alliance
970-285-9036

Clare Bastable, Colorado Mountain Club
970-618-1341

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS CALL FOR BALANCED MANAGEMENT ON ROAN PLATEAU

All Garfield County City Councils Support Protecting Roan Plateau from Runaway Energy Development

RIFLE, CO-Citizens today praised decisions by every town and city council in Garfield County that strongly supported balanced management for the Roan Plateau. The Roan Plateau, administered by the Bureau of Land Management, is currently undergoing its first-ever comprehensive management plan, and cities and towns across the county want to make sure the top and cliffs of the Plateau are protected from intensive gas development.

In October, the BLM released preliminary management alternatives for the Roan Plateau in western Garfield County, known formally the Naval Oil Shale Reserve. The Roan Plateau is a quiet expanse of mostly undeveloped lands rising 3,500-feet above the Colorado River valley. Colored badlands ascend steeply up to striped gray cliffs. Above lies a broad and rolling plateau with dark forests, immense aspen groves, sagebrush parks, and wildflower meadows. Several creeks cross the plateau and drop into box canyons, featuring a spectacular 200-foot waterfall. These streams also hold some of the state's purest strains of imperiled Colorado River cutthroat trout. Known as one of the most biologically diverse areas on the Western Slope, the Plateau provides outstanding habitat for fish, wildlife and rare plant species.

Preliminary alternatives range from opening the entire area to natural gas drilling (under Alternative E) to providing for a mix of uses including wilderness, motorized recreation, and energy development (under Alternative F). Every council in Garfield County voted their preference for Alternative F, the most protective of those outlined.

"Oil and gas development is running rampant in Garfield County, and there is not much oversight," said Randy Corry, Silt Town Council member. "Letting the gas industry have free rein with somewhere as beautiful as the Roan Plateau is not in the best interest of the people. National leaders love to talk about local control. The local people in Garfield County have spoken, let's see if these officials will walk their talk, and act to keep the Roan Plateau undeveloped."

The City of Rifle, which borders the planning area, noted that the undeveloped feature of the Roan Plateau is a part of Rifle's defining landscape, providing its dramatic backdrop. Matt Sturgeon, Rifle city planner, sent a letter to the BLM on behalf of the city council, which finds Alternative F "most preferable". The letter states in part that:

"Locals consider the Roan Plateau a natural asset, a part of Rifle's identity. The Resource Management Plan prepared by the BLM needs to emphasize the relationships existing between the City of Rifle and the Plateau. The Plateau dominates the Rifle view shed and the landform helps people identify with our City in a positive fashion. The Plateau offers residents and visitors a place to recreate in various forms. The wildlife and fisheries attract visitors to our area, which is vital to our economy."

In passing resolutions, councils noted the area's value to a diverse economy and in supporting local quality-of-life.

"We understand the importance of the energy industry, but it is not the only engine driving the county's economy. Hunting and angling provide a steady and sustainable source of revenue for Western Colorado, and rival the ski industry for putting dollars into the state economy. The only way to protect our hunting and fishing economies, as

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well as our own opportunities for recreation, is to protect the undeveloped portions on the top of the plateau," said Dan Richardson, Glenwood Springs City Council member.

Fed up with runaway natural gas development in the area, local citizens said that support from all of the county's municipal governments show locals want BLM to prioritize more than just corporate profits. They expect BLM to protect open spaces, habitat, recreation, and local quality-of-life.

"This is an unequivocal statement to protect the Roan Plateau and against making it into a giant gas field," said Jane Hines, with the Grand Valley Citizens Alliance. "The Roan Plateau, left as it is, provides a tremendous benefit to our community. It is an oasis of undeveloped public land, surrounded by a growing gas field. And it is unique, with plants found there that grow nowhere else on earth. We hope that BLM, and the Bush Administration, will take a balanced approach and not lease every square inch of this special area to big oil and gas corporations."

Americans from across the state and nation also weighed in heavily in support of Alt. F. BLM's Glenwood Springs Field Office, responsible for the planning effort, received over 12,000 comments supporting balanced management for the Plateau. Conservationists urged elected leaders to take a stand to safeguard the Roan Plateau for the long-term benefit of local communities and the public.

"Citizens hope that state and nationally elected leaders will have the vision to protect the Roan Plateau. This is a call from citizens across the state and nation, and from all the towns in Garfield County, that BLM adopt a balanced plan and not simply write a blueprint to ravage the Plateau," said Clare Bastable, local Colorado Mountain Club representative.

BLM is expected to release a Draft Environmental Impact Statement in February 2003, detailing the alternatives and identifying a preferred management plan. For more information on the Roan Plateau planning process, people can visit the BLM's website at www.co.blm.gov/gsra/roanplateau.htm or the Colorado Wilderness Network's site at www.cowildernessnetwork.org