

Alternatives to gas drilling possible for Roan Plateau

By BOBBY MAGILL The Daily Sentinel

Tuesday, February 13, 2007

Reps. John Salazar and Mark Udall, D-Colo., are exploring possibilities for legislation for the future of the Roan Plateau and are looking for alternatives to the Bureau of Land Management's plan for energy development there, Salazar spokesman Rich Baca said Monday.

Legislation and other possibilities for the Roan are "things he's going to be exploring," Baca said.

Salazar and Udall will meet Feb. 22 with six groups who previously made formal proposals for the management of the Roan, possibly including Garfield County Commissioner Tresi Haupt, and representatives of the city of Rifle, Wilderness Society, Colorado Environmental Coalition, Colorado Division of Wildlife and the Colorado Mule Deer Association.

Salazar and Udall aren't inviting many spectators, however, and that includes the BLM. The 2:30 p.m. meeting at the Glenwood Springs Community Center will be at the same time as the BLM Northwest Resource Advisory Council meeting in Grand Junction, which will include officials from the BLM's Glenwood Springs Field Office, who have jurisdiction over the Roan.

And, the meeting room Salazar rented only accommodates 15 people, Glenwood Springs Community Center interim director Bruce Munroe said.

Baca said Salazar and Udall are fishing for "possibilities" for the Roan other than the one developed with the DOW. That would allow one energy company to drill the Roan while occupying 350 acres at a time, a controversial plan issued last year for which the BLM is expected to give its final approval sometime this year.

BLM spokesman David Boyd said Monday that a final decision could come by early summer on the management plan for the 73,602-acre Roan Plateau Planning Area north of Interstate 70 between Rifle and Parachute. If a decision to open the Roan to drilling comes before the beginning of the summer, leases on the Roan could be auctioned as early as February 2008, he said.

The purpose of Udall and Salazar's meeting is for the congressmen to hear previous proposals that were fielded for the Roan before the BLM released its final plan to the public last September, and to "explore where we are and where we may go from here," Baca said.

He said the meeting is open to the public, but the public will not be invited to comment.

DOW spokesman Randy Hampton said Salazar asked the DOW to speak about its involvement in developing the BLM's plan.

Regardless of what action Salazar and Udall may take, leasing on the Roan is not necessarily imminent, Boyd said, but energy companies have been nominating parcels on the Roan for leasing for many years. The BLM, he said, has always denied the parcels, saying leases can't be sold until a final decision is made on the agency's plan for the plateau.

Leases near the Roan are selling for top dollar, however.

Boyd said the BLM sold three leases within 10 miles of the Roan on Feb. 8. Antero Resources bought one 115-acre lease for \$8,400 per acre. Oxy USA bought a 98-acre lease for \$700 per acre, while Puckett Investments bought one 18-acre lease for \$5,000 per acre.

Bobby Magill can be reached via e-mail at bmagill@gjds.com.