

## Target: Protecting Wilderness from Drilling

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Drilling for oil and natural gas occurs on millions of acres of public lands that are administered by the Bureau of Land Management. The agency has proposed a plan that would open up Colorado's Roan Plateau to drilling. Since 2005, RtE has argued that the proposed plan violates federal law, and advocates that BLM select an alternative which honors the community-supported compromise solution for the Roan Plateau. The compromise was designed to protect the area's top cliffs and utilizes state of the art drilling techniques readily available and applicable to the Roan.

### Help Save the Roan Plateau

#### Issue:

Whether drilling for natural gas should be allowed on the top of the Roan Plateau.

#### Background:

During the Spring of 2005, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) took public comment on a draft plan for Colorado's Roan Plateau. The Roan Plateau rises 3,500 feet above the Colorado River Valley, as an undeveloped island of public land amid a quickly growing complex of natural gas fields. Well pads, drill rigs, roads, pipelines, waste pits and other infrastructure already stretch for miles in every direction from the Roan Plateau, but the top remains relatively undisturbed, with broad expanses of wildflower meadows, immense stands of aspen, a 200 foot waterfall, and large tracts of roadless, wilderness quality lands. The Roan Plateau is widely known as a biological "hotspot" and is home to black bear, cougar and some of the state's prized deer and elk herds. Sensitive species include plants that grow nowhere else on Earth, and one of the more pure strains of native trout in the world. "Roan Plateau is a visually stunning, undeveloped island of public land and part of our natural and cultural heritage," says Colorado Environmental Coalition West Slope Director, Pete Kolbensschlag.

The plan has been a priority of the Bush administration, which is making moves to open up the area's minerals to energy corporations. In addition to energy development, the plan will manage off-road vehicle use, backcountry recreation, and habitat protection. Local communities and citizens around the nation have long favored a plan that would protect the Roan Plateau's scenic cliffs and undeveloped top. Unfortunately, in spite of this widespread support for a plan that offers meaningful protection for the Roan Plateau, the BLM has proposed a "preferred alternative" for managing the area that would result in massive drilling atop the Plateau, likely starting within the decade. Once drilling begins on top of the Roan Plateau, all other public uses would be diminished, and a range of natural resources would suffer. One-third of the deer herd is likely to be destroyed, and backcountry recreational opportunities will be eliminated, according to the draft plan and EIS released in November.

RtE Position:

RtE advocates that BLM select as its final plan an alternative which honors the community-supported compromise solution for the Roan Plateau that protects the area's top and cliffs and utilizes state of the art drilling techniques readily available and applicable to the Roan. As stated by Kolbenschlag, "The Roan Plateau's top and cliffs deserve to be protected, and the public lands managed for a range of uses, not only gas development. With wide-scale energy development throughout the region, an even-handed plan for the Roan Plateau would safeguard recreational choices, wildlife and our open landscape, keeping the Plateau's top and cliffs as they are today: bold, dramatic and undisturbed."

Update:

On July 11, 2008, Rock the Earth and a coalition of conservation and sportsmen's groups sued BLM to stop the August 14, 2008 wholesale leasing of all 55,000 acres of public land for drilling. The case will be argued in the Federal District Court of Colorado.

Links:

RtE Opening Brief in US District Court , dated January 16, 2009

RtE Complaint in US District Court , dated July 11, 2008

RtE's Protest

Letter to FEIS, dated Oct. 13, 2006

RtE's DEIS Comment Letter, dated April 8, 2005

Save Roan Plateau Letter

For more information or to download the proposed plan, go to: <http://www.roanplateau.ene.com/>