

August 14, 2007

## BLM Extends Comment Period For Part Of Roan Plan

(AP) DENVER The public will have an additional two weeks to comment on a management plan for some of the most environmentally sensitive areas on the Roan Plateau in western Colorado.

The Bureau of Land Management issued a final management plan for the plateau in June that would open some of the federal land on the western Colorado landmark to oil and gas development. A decision was delayed on 21,034 acres proposed as "areas of critical environmental concern" because the sites weren't adequately described in the plans.

The original comment deadline was Aug. 10. The BLM is giving people an additional 14 calendar days, starting once a notice is published in the Federal Register, expected no later than Aug. 20.

BLM spokesman Jim Sample said Tuesday that the agency approved the extension after complaints that people initially didn't have the option of submitting comments electronically.

The plan issued in June covers roughly 70 percent of the total management area of 73,602 acres on the plateau about 180 miles west of Denver.

The rest of the land, composed of four sites, has been proposed as areas of critical environmental concern. No development could occur on the surface, which means natural gas would have to be extracted from wells drilled offsite.

The BLM plan bars surface occupancy on another 17,336 acres, which officials say would ban surface disturbance on roughly 51 percent of the federal land.

The goal is to minimize development's effects on the wildlife, which includes some of the region's largest deer and elk herds and a genetically pure strain of native cutthroat trout.

Environmental, hunting and angling groups have criticized BLM for not setting aside more land as environmentally critical areas. They note that one of the options in the draft environmental impact statement proposed 36,184 acres, the amount the Colorado Division of Wildlife said would be necessary to protect the areas.

Critics have also said that the BLM could waive the rules barring drilling on the surface.

BLM spokesman David Boyd said while waivers could be granted, it would be difficult. He said bans on drilling during certain times of the year are sometimes waived on a

one-time basis, but he wasn't aware of any waivers of no-surface-occupancy stipulations.

The final management plan for the Roan Plateau projects 193 well pads and 1,570 wells over 20 years, including 13 pads and 210 wells on top.

On top, the BLM calls for oil and gas drilling to be done in stages and clusters to limit disturbance to 1 percent of the federal land at any time. Development would be focused on slopes with less than a 20 percent angle.

Eds: Information on submitting electronic comments on the proposed areas of critical environmental concern for the Roan Plateau will be available at <http://www.blm.gov/rmp/co/roanplateau/comments.htm>. Written comments may also be mailed to: Bureau of Land Management, Glenwood Springs Field Office, 50629, Glenwood Springs, CO 81601.