



Roan Plateau

Including Naval Oil Shale Reserves No. 1 and 3

Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment

and

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is BLM issuing this Plan?

In 1997, Congress transferred the Naval Oil Shale Reserves 1 and 3, which total 56,238 acres on and below the Roan Plateau, to the BLM from the Department of Energy. The Transfer Act directed BLM to lease the area for petroleum resource development and to complete a Resource Management Plan.

What geographic area does this plan cover?

This Resource Management Plan Amendment covers 73,602 acres of BLM-administered lands on top and below the Roan Plateau in northwestern Colorado. The total includes 56,238 acres of Naval Oil Shale Reserves 1 and 3 transferred to BLM in 1997, as well as an additional 17,364 acres of lands under BLM-administration prior to the transfer.

The Planning Area includes 34,758 acres of BLM lands on top of the Roan Plateau, and 38,844 acres of BLM lands below the rim (including the cliffs).

What does the plan address?

This Proposed Plan guides all management on the Roan Plateau, including grazing, travel management, recreation, lands and realty, oil and gas leasing and other activities

How are public comments submitted for the Draft addressed?

All substantive comments received during the 120-day public comment period on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement are addressed in the Proposed Plan document. Changes from the Draft in the Proposed Plan are largely the result of public comments received and close coordination with the formal cooperating agencies on this plan, including the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Garfield and Rio Blanco counties, the Town of Parachute, and the cities of Glenwood Springs and Rifle.

How does the Proposed Plan differ from the Preferred Alternative in the Draft?

The Proposed Plan falls within the range of alternatives analyzed in the Draft. It includes parts of Alternatives 2 and 3, as well as a creative oil and gas development approach proposed by the Colorado Department of Natural Resources.

The Proposed Plan takes an innovative, staged oil and gas development approach:

- Lands on top will be leased all at once, with a federal unit established.
- The federal unit allows more control of timing and location of development, and negates the need for multiple facilities, pipelines, roads, and other infrastructure.
- More than half of the planning area will have no surface occupancy restrictions, including portions of the critical mule deer winter range below the rim.
- Development will be highly controlled with no more than 1 percent of lands (350 acres) on top of the Plateau being disturbed at any one time.
- Development on top will be clustered on multi-well pads no closer than one-half mile apart.
- Development on top is restricted to the ridges, providing greater protection to the water resources, Colorado River cutthroat trout habitat, and scenic values of the canyons.
- Development on top will occur one ridge at a time.
- There are additional restrictions to protect wildlife, scenic views and water resources.

Why is BLM allowing oil and gas leasing on top of the Roan Plateau?

When Congress transferred the Naval Oil Shale Reserves on the Roan Plateau to BLM in 1997, the legislation explicitly directed BLM to lease the area for the exploration and production of petroleum resources and to develop a management plan. The act does not make a distinction between lands on top or below the Plateau.

The Proposed Plan addresses the direction of the Transfer Act, yet still provides a high level of protection for the lands on top of the Roan Plateau.

Although much of the debate about oil and gas development on the Roan Plateau has focused on protecting the top, some of the most critical wildlife habitat is found below the rim. The Proposed Plan offers a higher level of protection for the lands both on top and below the Plateau than was found in the Preferred Alternative of the Draft. It also allows more natural gas to be recovered.

Unlike the Draft Preferred Alternative, the Proposed Alternative does not defer leasing lands on top of the Plateau, instead it opts for a restricted, staged development approach that provides more protections not only for the top, but also for lands below the rim.

The Roan Plateau contains some of Colorado's and the nation's richest mineral resources. This mineral wealth is why the area was initially set aside as the Naval Oil Shale Reserve. The legislation transferring these lands specifically instructs BLM to open the area to petroleum leasing "as soon as practicable" and to manage the area under its multiple-use mandate.

The BLM must manage the Roan Plateau, initially set aside as a national mineral reserve, in accordance with applicable laws and regulations, as well as consider national energy policy and public input.

Demand for natural gas continues to increase – not just for heating homes but also for clean power generation. The Rocky Mountain states, including Colorado, are considered the best domestic source for increasing production of natural gas over the next ten years as production in other areas begins to fall.

Is drilling already being allowed on top of the Plateau?

There is no drilling on BLM-administered lands on top of the Roan Plateau. As of August 2006, 31 wells existed on private lands on top of the Roan Plateau. Within the 53,805 acres of the Roan Plateau Planning Area that occur on top of the Plateau, more than 19,000 acres are private lands over which BLM has no control. Also, a large amount of private lands are found on the Plateau outside the planning area.

Is BLM allowing new roads to the top of the Roan to be built?

Several roads are being built on the west side of the Roan Plateau by oil and gas companies. These roads are entirely on private land and are being built to access private land. BLM has no jurisdiction over these roads.

Why not allow another public comment period?

An additional public comment period is not needed because the impacts from the Proposed Plan fall within the range of impacts previously analyzed in the Draft Plan, on which the public and cooperators had extensive opportunity to comment.

BLM has taken a number of steps beyond legal requirements to facilitate public involvement in the Roan plan, beginning with public focus groups prior to the initial scoping phase. Last year the official public comment period on the draft plan was extended from 90 to 120 days, although the public actually had 144 days to comment from the public release of the Draft to the close of the public comment period.

Following the public comment period, six months of meetings were held with our cooperating agencies to refine a proposal submitted by the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. In addition to CDNR, our cooperators include two county and three local town governments. These meetings were open to the public and well-covered by the Glenwood and Grand Junction newspapers.

The public has an additional opportunity for meaningful involvement during the 30-day public protest period that follows the release of the Proposed Plan. Should any significant new information be revealed by the public during this period, a supplemental Draft or Final EIS could subsequently be prepared, which would involve additional public comment.

Why not wait until technology improves?

The proposed plan requires the use of the latest technology and best management practices to recover natural gas, including directional drilling and multi-well pads. This will significantly reduce impacts to fish and wildlife habitat, scenic views, and water resources. Because the drilling under the Proposed Plan will be staged, BLM can require newer technology be used as it becomes available and as new stages of development are approved.

Now that the Proposed Plan is out, how soon will we see mineral development on the ground in the new areas identified for leasing?

A 30-day protest period follows the release of the Proposed Plan. The Governor also has up to 60-days to complete his Consistency Review.

Next, any protests submitted need to be resolved. Following protest resolution, BLM would sign a Record of Decision, which will detail and make official a final decision.

Lands would then be leased through the formal leasing process, which takes place quarterly in Colorado. The parcels on top of the Roan are in a federal unit and will be leased at the same time and developed over time. Parcels below the rim would be available for leasing at a quarterly BLM lease sale, once they are nominated by an outside party.

Lessees then need to provide detailed information to BLM about their development plans. BLM conducts an environmental analysis of the specific development plans through the public NEPA process. The Proposed Plan permits oil and gas leasing. Drilling permits and decisions about specific locations, etc., come after this site-specific analysis, which will also have a public involvement process.