

Background on the Roan Plateau

As part of the “drill, baby, drill” strategy employed by the George W. Bush administration from 2000 to 2008, the president issued an executive order to [“expedite energy-related projects”](#) by limiting protections for wildlife and natural resources, and fast-tracking leasing on public lands.

So many leases were sold during that period they exceeded both demand and the [oil companies’ capacity](#) to develop them. Companies bought millions of acres of leases during this land rush, including leases on the Roan Plateau.

In 2009, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar told [Grist](#) that the Obama administration’s approach to oil and gas development would be dramatically different. “We are changing the way the Department of Interior does business,” said Salazar. “What this shows is a dramatic change from the last eight years, where you had a one-way road to energy independence, which was drill, drill, drill.”

Since then, the Obama administration implemented important leasing reforms, including development of “master leasing plans” to better balance industrial oil and gas development in areas with remarkable natural resources. This balanced approach has significantly reduced litigation over new leasing on ecologically important public lands.

The oil and gas industry and pro-drilling western governments have continually challenged the Obama administration’s approach and seek to make fossil fuel extraction the predominant use of public lands.

Today, states and industry advocates are arguing in court that BLM does not have legal authority to regulate fracking on public lands.

They also have sued to challenge the [Obama administration’s leasing reforms](#) and oppose efforts to develop master leasing plans (such as the plan expected for the area around Moab that includes Canyonlands and Arches national parks).

The settlement agreement protecting the Roan is one of the most vivid examples of the benefits of rejecting “drill, baby, drill.” It also demonstrates how protecting pristine public lands can reduce conflicts between resource development and resource protection.

In 2012, after several years of litigation, the court set aside the Bush administration’s plan for the Roan. The parties then came to the table and hammered out a settlement that provides lasting protections for the Roan while allowing development to proceed in certain areas.

A BLM auction in August 2008 at the end of the George W. Bush administration leased all of the federal lands on the plateau for drilling.

Conservation Colorado, Trout Unlimited, National Wildlife Federation, The Wilderness Society, Wilderness Workshop, Natural Resources Defense Council,

Sierra Club, Rock the Earth, Rocky Mountain Wild and the Colorado Mountain Club, represented by Earthjustice, sued to protect the important scenic, wilderness and wildlife values of the Roan and won the case before the U.S. District Court in Denver in 2012.

Settlement negotiations lasting nearly two years produced an agreement in 2014, which led to the new BLM plan expected to be adopted this fall.

Resources:

More details can be found at:

http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Programs/land_use_planning/rmp/roan_plateau.html



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