

A New Day for Conservation:

Protection for Colorado's Roan Plateau



Photo by John Gale, NWF

Western Colorado's Roan Plateau, towering 3,000 feet above the Colorado River, is a backcountry haven for big game, genetically pure Colorado River cutthroat trout and a magnet for outdoor and wildlife enthusiasts, hunters and anglers. The settlement of a lawsuit by conservation and sportsmen's groups over balancing conservation and energy development on the Roan clears the way for a new, responsible management plan and a new lease on life for this natural gem.

The biologically diverse area ranges in elevation from 5,000 feet to 9,000 feet and hosts varied habitats and vegetation including mountain meadows, juniper woodlands, sagebrush, aspen stands, gambel oak and Douglas fir. The Roan holds thousands of acres of remote roadless land and provides habitat for some of the country's largest mule deer and elk herds, bears, mountain lions and some of the rarest plants in North America. Deer and elk travel to the top during the summer and head to the base for forage in winter.

The lands on top of the plateau are bisected by four streams: Trapper Creek, the East Fork of Parachute Creek, Northwater Creek and the East Middle Fork. Most of the streams contain important populations of rare, native Colorado River cutthroat trout, a species that occupies less than 10 percent of its historic range. The plateau is an oasis for wildlife, hunters, anglers, hikers and sightseers – especially as development has spread on surrounding lands.

The Bureau of Land Management has described the Roan Plateau as one of a small handful of the most biologically rich areas in Colorado, and observed that it "is clearly of comparable biological significance" to several national parks and monuments in this state.

Local communities at the base of the Roan have long depended on these public lands for their outdoor recreational opportunities, including hunting and high-quality backcountry fishing. The outdoor activities it supports are an important, sustainable part of northwest Colorado's roughly \$9.3 billion outdoor recreation economy.

Conservation, community and sportsmen's groups sued to block a 2008 drilling plan by the Bureau of Land Management that would have jeopardized what makes the Roan Plateau an irreplaceable landscape. In 2012, a federal court in Denver ruled in their favor and set aside the BLM plan. The recent settlement provides an opportunity to strike a better balance between conservation and energy development.

GROUPS THAT CHALLENGED THE BLM's PLAN

Colorado Mountain Club
Conservation Colorado
Colorado Trout Unlimited
National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
Rock the Earth
Rocky Mountain Wild
Sierra Club
The Wilderness Society
Wilderness Workshop

Questions & Answers on the Settlement

What's next?

The BLM will cancel most of the leases atop the plateau within 60 days and refund the money paid for them. Leases held by other companies at the base will remain in effect but safeguards to protect wildlife habitat will apply. The lawsuit will then be dismissed.

The BLM will write a new management plan for the Roan that considers a "settlement alternative" with terms described in the settlement agreement. If the BLM's new plan adopts the settlement alternative, all parties agree not to challenge that new plan.

How would it better protect the Roan?

BLM will cancel 16 of 18 leases atop the plateau and the settlement alternative provides that those lands will not be re-leased under the plan. If BLM decides to adopt the settlement alternative, more than 90 percent of the public land on the top of the plateau would be protected from surface disturbance.

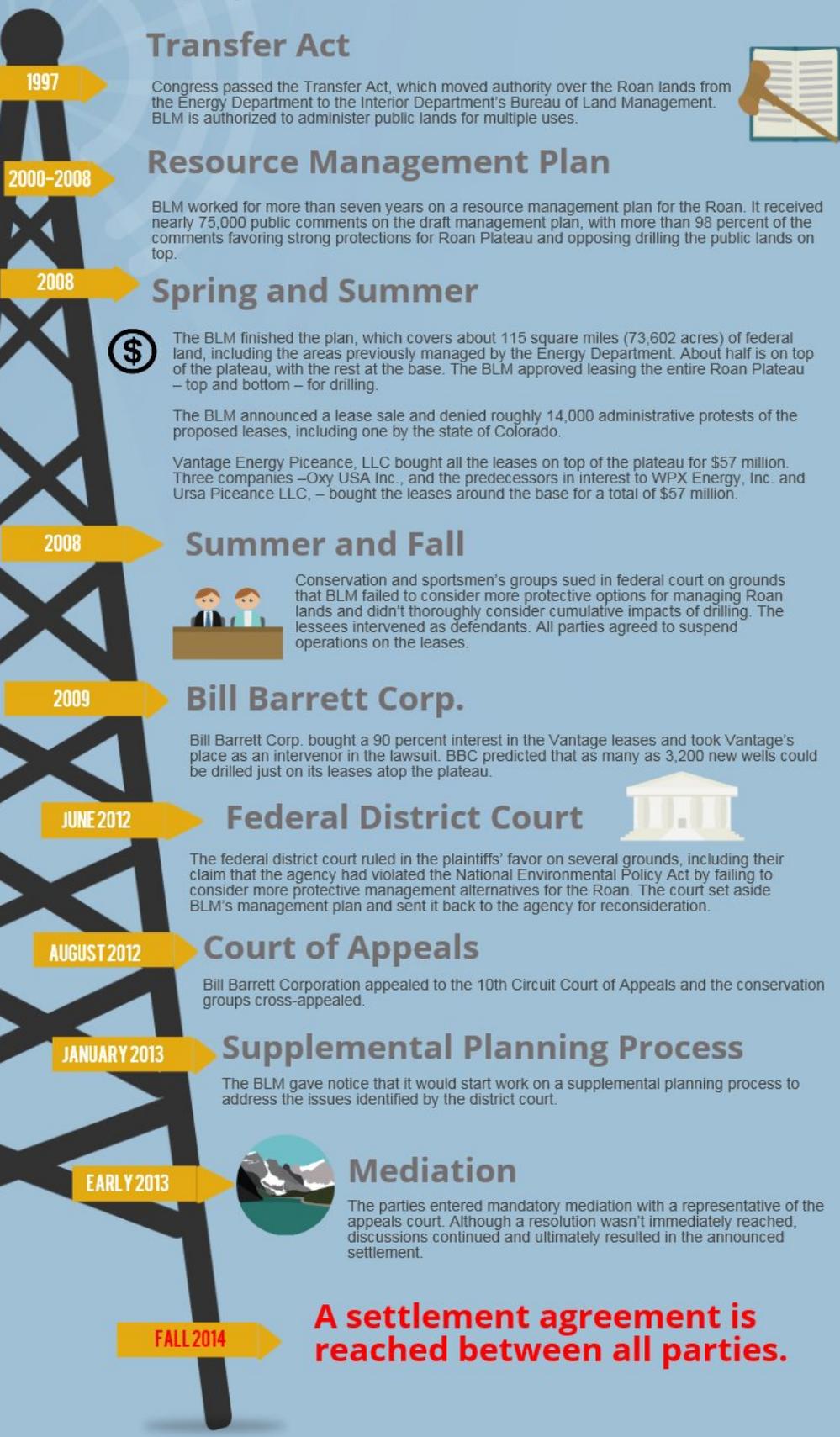
The settlement also strengthens "no-surface occupancy" provisions for existing leases at the base, which protect important wildlife habitat, steep slopes and other fragile resources while still allowing for development of the resource. The NSO protections require companies to access any oil and gas under those lands by drilling from other locations. At the base, more than 50 percent of the lease acreage would be protected from surface disturbance.

Will state and local governments have to return their share of money from the leases?

The state of Colorado, which supports the settlement, recognizes that the federal government must recover the share of the proceeds from the canceled leases that were paid to Colorado. Our understanding is the state plans to propose a budget that will address this matter and prevent local governments from being affected.

TIMELINE: THE ROAN PLATEAU

Prior to 1997 The Roan was part of the U.S. Naval Oil Shale Reserves Nos. 1 and 3, which encompassed land atop the plateau and below the rim.



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