

Forest Service heeds concerns raised over travel plan for Rico/West Dolores district

By **Jimbo Buickerood**

Public Lands Coordinator

Achievements in conservation can be long, drawn-out engagements and certainly our 2½ year advocacy on behalf of the Rico/West Dolores travel management (TM) area entered that realm recently – and it’s a reason to celebrate!

In December our formal appeal of the decision notice on the Rico/West Dolores Travel Management Plan was upheld by the USFS Regional review team, and supported in turn by San Juan Public Lands Supervisor/Center Manager Mark Stiles. This significant victory confirmed our judgment that the environmental assessment of the plan was flawed in both process and outcome. The net result is that the Dolores Ranger District must press the “restart” button on its travel management process.

The Alliance entered this process in the summer of 2007 and since then we have both engaged directly in the environmental assessment process as well as organized members, local citizens and numerous organizational allies to participate in the stakeholder planning. We discovered that there was indeed a broad coalition that shared the similar belief that the 250,000 acre Rico/West Dolores travel management area is a unique wild landscape that we hold dear – as do all the creatures that rely on these wilds as their habitat. As we have noted before, the area includes one wilderness area, seven roadless areas, stream segments eligible for Wild and Scenic designation, and some of the most significant habitat for numerous species, including elk and lynx. The

area also includes important “human habitat”: the town of Rico and numerous businesses reliant on back-country tourism, hunting, fishing, horseback riding and other activities.

Joining our written appeal was the Colorado Mountain Club and other appeals were filed by Dunton Hot Springs, Alliance members Bob and Nancy Marion, Trout Unlimited, and former outfitter Gene Story. We know that letters of concern were also sent to the regional review team by the town of Rico, the Rico Alpine Society and the Division of Wildlife. The USFS regional review team noted 21 separate points of appeal and judged that 18 of these should be reversed. Stiles confirmed the review team’s findings in his letter calling to “reverse in whole the manager’s decision.”

These 18 appeal points covered a broad spectrum of issues that were problematic with the process. Briefly, these issues – that we had been raising throughout the planning process - include an insufficient analysis of biologic, socioeconomic and Wild and Scenic River issues; inadequate review of the motorized trail/road seasonal closure issue; an arbitrary decision to sanction motorcycle travel in the Bear Creek watershed and other areas previously zoned by the agency as “semi-primitive, non-motorized;” lack of site-specific scientific analysis; inadequate assessment of dispersed camping and trailhead impacts; and a deficiency in minimizing or mitigating impacts of motorized use on wildlife and forest resources.

To top it off, the review team noted that “the decision notice failed to consider substantive comments”

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By Joe Griffith

Alliance Board President

As many of you know, the travel management portion of the San Juan Public Lands Management Plan has been taking an independent course over the past few years. The Columbine Ranger District was broken into various Landscapes.

There have been meetings and public involvement for some of these landscapes which were originally to be completed by 2010. Recently an extension was granted and the deadline for completion is now 2013.

The national orders to the various Forest Managers were to limit Off Road Vehicle incursions that damage the public lands. The Forest Service, in the next few years, is to publish maps that designate which trails are open to motorized travel. All other lands will be off limits. And, presumably, there will be vast areas for quiet use, where human travel will be limited to foot or horseback.

As you might expect, enforcement will be a major challenge. While most of the motorized travelers will restrict themselves to designated routes, there are a number of riders who will not. The Forest Service is inadequately staffed to monitor the large area of National Forest and BLM lands. They have experi-

enced a systematic reduction of their budget. In the present economic climate it seems unlikely those reductions will be reversed.

ATVs, along with snowmobiles in the winter, are not required to have visible rear license plates. Remember the case of the landowner above Silverton whose leg was broken when he was run over by two ATV drivers who didn't like being told they were trespassing on his land. Without license plates, the owner had no way to identify them as they sped away from him. Above Andrews Lake there have been cases of snowmobilers encroaching on the Weminuche Wilderness. Even if someone saw them, how could they be identified?

U.S. Rep. John Salazar and Sen. Mark Udall are sponsoring a bill to increase fines for damage to public lands and to allow the money collected to be used to restore damage done. This is an excellent idea, and is worthy of our support. But the enforcement will be a challenge. There are only a few law enforcement officers on the land.

Motorcycles, including dirt bikes, already do have licenses and can use public highways and roads to access trails. It is time to require that ATVs and snowmobiles be officially licensed, and that the license is displayed prominently on the back of these vehicles. These requirements would make the vehicles less anonymous and the license fees could be used to pay for more enforcement personnel.

This would be a logical step in working to preserve our beautiful public lands. These lands are in danger of being degraded to the point that they bear the scars of overuse and no longer provide adequate habitat for the animal life that makes wild places so compelling. ■

Mission

The San Juan Citizens Alliance is a grassroots organization dedicated to social, economic and environmental justice. We organize San Juan Basin residents to protect our water and air, our public lands, our rural character, and our unique quality of life while embracing the diversity of our region's people, economy and ecology.

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By Megan Graham

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If your life is anything like mine - or that of most middle-aged (yikes!) Americans - the daily details have an uncanny ability to obscure the big picture goals you are working to achieve.

This is true in all areas of life, from child-rearing - as is embarrassingly evidenced by my nagging response to dirty socks curled up on the carpet while said socks' owner is busily engaged in some life-enriching activity that I overlook - to proficient mogul skiing - a challenge that, much as I wish otherwise, will never be met unless I actually ski the moguls. But then there are those moments that put the details into perspective: My daughter, emerging from the messiest room known to humanity, announces her plan to sell lollipops to save endangered tigers. Or I manage to link three turns on Blackburn's Bash. The bigger picture, however fleetingly, comes into focus.

This inability to see (or reach for) the forest for the trees can too often be true in our work, too, for as we put out the daily fires that ignite on our various campaigns, the larger flame can smolder without our attention. But at the same time, there are those moments that connect us to the context of the work we do, if you look for them.

For me recently, one such moment struck when I was on an early-morning drive to Silverton for a meeting with the San Juan County Commission. It was a classic winter bluebird day, with sparkling snow blanketing the San Juans. The setting provided the perfect preamble for the meeting where the commissioners unanimously voted to support the Hermosa Creek River Protection Workgroup's recommendations for lands protection of that iconic watershed.

Reminding ourselves of the broader vision we hope to achieve as an organization, as staff members serving that organization, and as board members



guiding it takes discipline - to say nothing of scheduling. At the Alliance we are constantly striving to fit our daily activities into the larger framework of what we are trying to achieve, but to keep that focus intentional, we at times have to sit down and set our long-term goals and determine how we aim to reach them.

That is just what the Alliance is doing right now, and the strategic planning exercise involving our staff, board and task force members is a welcome and inspiring reminder of what we are all in this for: the land, people, wildlife and quality of life that makes the San Juan Basin so special to each of us. The exercise has provided us all an opportunity to take a broad view of where the organization is today, and where we would like to be three years from now, and, more importantly, how we plan to get there.

The exercise reconnects us all with the roots of the Alliance while simultaneously setting a course for the organization's future. It provides the space for a celebration of our successes and an analysis of our failures, so that both can be put to the best possible use for future issues that arise. Perhaps most importantly, strategic planning gives us the time and space to consider just who it is we are at the Alliance: who we serve, who are our stakeholders - and then how we best meet those varying needs. In that effort, our campaign goals are shaped, with input and discussion among our expert staff, dedicated board and committed task force members.

What this planning

process will ultimately produce is a framework for our daily work: the big picture goals as well as the strategies we will implement in reaching those goals. One important component of the conversation, too, is identifying ways that each staff member can effectively contribute to others' campaign foci, identifying areas of overlap that we can use to our strategic advantage. After all, the Alliance is fortunate to have a team of extremely knowledgeable, dedicated and forward-thinking staff. Collaboration among those players can only benefit our overall goals of protecting quality of life in the San Juan Basin.

Much as I am revealing my inner nerd by saying so, I am excited about the strategic planning efforts the Alliance is pursuing. There is so much history, knowledge and commitment to draw on in planning for the future and, being conscientious about finding those opportunities and articulating them will benefit all of us who live and visit here - as well as the wild places, wildlife, clean air, water, diversity and community that brought us to the region in the first place. Keeping those even bigger picture items in mind will ensure that the Alliance's strategic planning process - and the activities that follow it - will be successful.

While we won't be able to gaze at the glittering mountains we aim to protect, or float the roaring rivers that shape life in the Southwest, we will envision them as we discuss the best route forward. Stay tuned for the outcomes of the Alliance's strategic planning process. ■



Hermosa Workgroup issues recommendations for land protection

By Meghan Maloney
River Campaign Director

Over the past few months, the Hermosa Creek Drafting Committee has been working diligently to create a consensus-based document that reflects the goals and values of the larger Hermosa Creek workgroup - the first public workgroup for the larger River Protection Group. The River Protection Group will consider the future management strategy possibilities – including protective legislation - for six rivers within the San Juan National Forest in a locally led, consensus-based process.

The rivers include the Animas, San Juan, Piedra, and Pine rivers as well as Vallecito and Hermosa creeks. The goal, and mission statement of the River Protection Group is to involve the public in

the drafting committee has agreed to:

- Work on land based protection measures and try to include them in the on-going San Juan Mountains wilderness bill if possible.

- “Circle back” on discussions about water protections (including Wild & Scenic Rivers) within the basin. This approach will allow a more accurate picture of River Protection Group stakeholder goals within each of the five basins (San Juan, Piedra, Pine/Vallecito, Animas, Hermosa).

- Create a special management area (SMA) for the entire watershed – this new concept for legislation will keep the watershed intact as a unit and promote protection, management, and conservation along watershed boundaries.

- Wilderness on the eastern half of the watershed up to (and excluding Corral draw). Boundary of wilderness at Hermosa Creek yet to be determined.

- Establish zones to prevent the proliferation of roads. The fine details have yet to be worked out but preliminarily include three zones: wilderness, southern and eastern roadless areas, and northern zones.

- Minerals: patented and unpatented claims will be included within the SMA. Group has agreed to mineral withdrawal for the watershed but details for existing claims on northern and southern ends

developing measures to protect the natural values of selected streams in the region while allowing water development to continue.

The current focus is on Hermosa Creek, where the drafting committee has been working out details such as boundaries, language, and prohibitions/exceptions for Hermosa Creek. While discussions are still under way, thus far



Photos by Meghan Maloney

TOP: A wild geranium grows along the Lower Hermosa Creek Trail.

BOTTOM: A view of Clear Creek as seen from the Lower Hermosa Creek Trail.

still to be worked out.

If you would like to talk about the activities of the Hermosa drafting committee, please contact Meghan Maloney at (970) 259-3583 or meghan@sanjuancitizens.org. ■

New! Hermosa Creek Campaign Web site

Learn more about the Alliance’s protection goals for Hermosa Creek. Please visit our new Web site focused on conservation efforts for Hermosa Creek at www.hermosacreek.org.

On the site, you can learn more about the campaign, get your questions answered, see maps, send in your favorite photos of Hermosa Creek, show your support and sign up to stay informed about the latest Hermosa Creek news.

Contact Meghan at (970) 259-3583 or meghan@sanjuancitizens.org if you have any questions.

Water rights filings raise concerns

By Josh Joswick

Oil & Gas Organizer

To paraphrase the famous bumper sticker: stuff happens. And right now, there is a fair amount of “stuff” happening. Here’s the scenario:

Two local ranchers offer up the opinion that the gas industry should be treated like any other extractor of groundwater under Colorado water law. This is not necessarily the most radical idea, but a good one nonetheless. The ranchers then go to court with the position that the water associated with coalbed methane (CBM) production is tributary groundwater; the industry argues that it is not tributary. Both the District 7 Water Court and the Colorado Supreme Court find in favor of the ranchers, and the gas industry now has to deal with the Colorado Division of Water Resources, as well as the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, as the gas producers will now have to get permits for the water they extract as well as for the gas. Pretty straightforward so far, but as with most good stories, it begins to twist.

The Division of Water Resources’ State Engineer’s Office is now tasked with figuring out how to deal with this situation, and it establishes a rule on how the industry will comply with the courts’ decisions. In this rulemaking, the industry offers up a study that it paid for as the definitive document determining where the tributary and non-tributary CBM groundwater is in La Plata and Archuleta counties. Without independent peer, agency or public review, the SEO accepts this study, and bases its ruling on it, thereby affecting thousands of La Plata and Archuleta County residents, most of whom neither had an opportunity for involvement in this overriding matter, nor were aware of it having happened.

The industry then made these residents aware. Thousands of La Plata and Archuleta County residents received let-

ters announcing that the gas companies were filing for water rights on the production water under these people’s property. That got attention and the phones at the Alliance office started ringing with people on the other end asking, “What does this mean?” In a nutshell, the industry was directed to get permits from the Division of Water Resources for their activities. Instead of stopping at that, the industry decided to take the unnecessary step of getting rights on that produced water. The two main questions that arise are: “Why would they do this when they do not have to?” and “What can people do about it?”

The Alliance convened a public meeting to explain this extremely complicated issue to very concerned people. With the help of local water attorney Amy Huff, who gave a brief presentation and then fielded questions for an hour and a half, people now understand what they can and should do to protect themselves and to stop this water grab. Because that is precisely what this is: a water grab.

Subsequent to the Alliance’s meeting, the state engineer came to La Plata County and put on two meetings of its own. This was a nice gesture - however there was some misinformation disseminated at those meetings that left people wondering if they can do anything at all about the water rights filings.

The Alliance filed statements of opposition to the water rights claims and will be monitoring developments as the issue proceeds through the courts and the regulatory process.

There are so many things wrong with this mess - from the way it was handled to the process’ end result. But the overriding question is whether an extremely questionable change to more than a century of Colorado water law should go uncontested. The Alliance says no and will continue to fight this. If you want more information, please contact Josh Joswick at josh@sanjuancitizens.org. ■

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and that the dismissal of Alliance-authored Alternative B was unjustified. Alternative B, the “Resource Protection/Balanced Use” alternative, was also supported by the town of Rico and the Rico Alpine Society.

What’s next in the process? Overall the appeal decision indicates that, rather than an environmental assessment, an environmental impact statement should have been prepared. Many of the metrics that indicate an EIS is the appropriate choice exist: The issues to be examined are widespread, often their elements are complex, and many aspects are controversial as well. We will meet soon with San Juan Public Lands staff prior to the recommencement of the process to relay what a majority of the appellants view as suitable and necessary components.

As the next Decision Notice will not likely be available until year’s end, we are particularly concerned that interim management procedures ensure that any resource degradation is halted in the meantime. This should include a prohibition on motorized cross-country travel (as required by the 2005 travel management rule and closures - either seasonal or year-round - on any trails where unmitigated disruption is ongoing, including unabated erosion, noise pollution, wildlife habitat disruption, watershed impairment, and others.

As I’m sure is all too obvious, our success in the appeal process does not mean the vigilance and work is over for Alliance members and staff. Rather, we have gained the opportunity to press ahead for a travel management decision resolution on the Rico/West Dolores that is befitting the respect we have for that landscape and its natural inhabitants. Stay tuned, because all of us still have a part to play in the defense of this amazing wildland in our backyards. ■

EPA proposes ozone standard changes that could push region to non-attainment

By Mike Eisenfeld
New Mexico Organizer

Because of its significant impact on public and environmental health, air quality in the Four Corners region is a priority for San Juan Citizens Alliance. As such, we are gravely concerned about the many major contributors of air pollution that exist in the region, as well as those that are proposed. Of primary concern is the level of ozone that lingers in our collective air, and new proposed standards issued by the Environmental Protection Agency make the issue all the more pressing.

Ozone, the key ingredient of smog, is a poisonous gas that forms when two key air pollutants - nitrogen oxides (NOx) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) - react with sunlight. Ground level ozone has documented human public health impacts including reduced lung function, adverse effects on the respiratory system and aggravation of asthma, and re-

duced cardiovascular function.

Ozone levels in the rural southwestern United States have increased significantly in areas of high density energy development (including oil and gas drilling and operations as well as coal-fired power plants) over a relatively short timeframe (40 years). Primary stationary sources of high levels of emission of ozone precursors in the Four Corners region include the Four Corners Power Plant, San Juan Generating Station, refineries, and oil and gas facilities.

One of the most daunting challenges facing us is navigating the multi-jurisdictional juggernaut of agencies and entities that approve energy projects and oversee air quality in the region. The Alliance participated in the Four Corners Air Quality Task Force that produced a report in November 2007 consisting of voluntary mitigation options that could be implemented to reduce ozone levels and keep the region in

compliance with federal ozone standards. There has been no legal trigger to implement the task force's recommendations, though, or to address the cumulative sources contributing to the formation of ozone.

Federal health standards enacted in March 2008 by the EPA limit ozone to no more than 75 parts per billion over an eight-hour period to safeguard public health are now expected to be lowered to 60-70 ppb in 2010. This could place a large part of the Four Corners region above those limits, because voluntary mitigation actions taken to date to reduce ozone in the region have not been effective. We can now expect that mandatory emission control measures will be required if the region's ozone levels exceed the new standard. The Alliance supports the 60-70 ppb standard for ozone because scientific advisories on the benefits to human health in adopting a more stringent standard make it clear that public and environmental

health are negatively affected by the high levels of ozone we have in the area.

We are hopeful that agencies involved in monitoring and protecting air quality in the region - including the EPA, New Mexico Environment Department, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Air Pollution Control Division, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, and tribal air quality programs - are given the tools, the mandate, and the mission to improve public health conditions, apply better control technologies on our existing industrial facilities, eliminate and reduce NOx and VOC emissions, require offsets for new sources of ozone precursor emissions, and truly evaluate air quality impacts prior to haphazardly permitting new emission sources throughout the region. The Alliance intends to continue our diligent work to see that ozone levels in the region are reduced. ■

River Protection Workgroup kicks off San Juan process

By Meghan Maloney
River Campaign Director

For the last 22 months, the Alliance's River Campaign has been working in-depth in the local, collaborative, community process focused on making recommendations for managing the public lands surrounding Hermosa Creek. This workgroup was one of five planned for the coming two years. The second workgroup will be focused on the east and west forks of the San Juan River.

The process will follow a similar

framework to the Hermosa Creek process. Phase I will focus on providing background information and establishing the process the group will follow. Phase II will focus on the values in both east and west forks, including the natural, social, cultural, and economic values as well as current protections. Phase III - the heart of the process - asks the community to look into the future and discuss options for possible protections of these special public lands. The steering committee has made some changes to streamline the process and aims to complete the San Juan workgroup (and the

four remaining groups) at a somewhat accelerated pace with a goal of producing recommendations within eight to 10 meetings.

True to the heart of the River Protection Workgroup, anyone who has an interest and attends has a seat at the table and is considered a stakeholder in the process.

The next meeting of the San Juan workgroup will take place at 5:30 p.m., March 25 at the Pagosa Springs Community Center. For more information, contact Meghan Maloney at (970) 259-3583 or meghan@sanjuancitizens.org. ■

Congress loses appetite for meaningful comprehensive immigration reform bill

By Eddie Soto
Compañeros Coordinator

The Obama administration came into office with the promise that comprehensive immigration reform was one of its top four priorities to achieve in the first year. Unfortunately the health care battle is taking a much longer time than anybody had foreseen and is creating fear among all politicians to move forward on difficult and contentious issues. But comprehensive immigration reform cannot wait for politicians to feel that there will be no backlash from either side of the political spectrum.

Two years ago when the Democrats pushed a bill that would have severely curtailed the rights of immigrant workers and future refugees and migrants, trying to appease the enforcement-only pundits, the people who believed in human rights for all withdrew support for any bill. The whole process fell apart with anti-immigrant rights groups claiming that nobody wanted comprehensive immigration reform.

Last November, the House introduced a bill that took a pragmatic point of view striking a balance between those who oppose any kind of immigration and those who favor a path to citizenship. The bill would mandate that all current immigrants who lack official status would have to register with the United States Citizen and Immigration Service, and they would then receive temporary non-immigrant status, which would allow them to remain in the country and place them in line for citizenship behind everybody currently in the system.

The bill would also require these immigrants to get biometrics ID cards, pay fines for being out of status, and mandate that all back taxes be paid. The bill would also mandate that all out of status immigrants receive criminal background checks and would not permit anybody convicted of a crime of moral turpitude to obtain temporary non-immigrant status would mandate they be deported. The bill would eventually require all businesses to assure that their employees have proper immigration status. There are many things to dislike in this bill, as well as many things to like. On balance though, it is a sensible compromise that leaves both sides feeling that their main concerns were addressed, yet changes the dysfunctional system that currently exists.

Congress seems to have lost its appetite for comprehensive immigration reform, citing the bad economy and the indications that both legal and illegal immigration trends are down. That makes now the perfect time to address this issue while the system is not under massive stress. The structure will have to change to make sure that it enforces rules with employers, and to revamp the system in one that allows for the steady and logical flow of immigrants. The USCIS also needs to make sure that the new rules are clear and enforceable.

To help Compañeros continue putting pressure on Congress to address this critical issue, contact Eddie Soto at (970) 375-9406 or eddie@sanjuancitizens.org. ■

HD Mountains get day in court

By Megan Graham
Executive Director

After more than a year of waiting for a hearing, the Alliance's lawsuit challenging the BLM's decision that would allow drilling in the HD Mountains roadless area went before a judge just before the New Year. This important step in the case gave our attorneys the opportunity to present oral arguments on behalf of the pristine landscapes of the iconic HDs - as well as the policies designed to protect the broad spectrum of resources that comprise them.

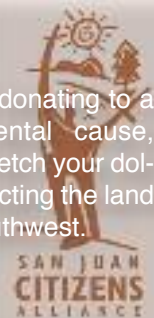
Judge Richard Matsch heard arguments presented on behalf of the Alliance and our partners in the case - Oil and Gas Accountability Project, Colorado Environmental Coalition, Colorado Wild, and The Wilderness Society - by Earthjustice attorney Mike Freeman. Matsch asked many questions about the Forest Service's procedures for approving wells and what appeals are available, indicating he had done his homework on the case and is aware of the issues at stake. Following the arguments, our attorneys filed some briefs that elaborated on some of the issues Matsch raised, giving him a more comprehensive body of data to use in informing his decision. His ruling could come at any time.

The next steps for the HD Mountains depend on the timing of Matsch's ruling as well as its content. Until April 1, some of the leases in question are protected from drilling by seasonal closures for wildlife protection, and are therefore enjoying a de facto reprieve from any damaging activity. If Matsch is still deliberating the arguments after that, the Alliance will be carefully monitoring any move to drill and decide how to respond accordingly.

There are a number of avenues available to protect the pristine roadless region that comprises the HD Mountains. Determining just which of these will be necessary is a matter of waiting to see what opportunities and threats arise in the weeks - or months - to come. Stay tuned for the latest on the HDs. ■

Act Local

When thinking about donating to a social or environmental cause, think local! We can stretch your dollar a long way in protecting the land and values of the Southwest.



Alliance takes broad view in planning for shale gas exploration

By Jimbo Buickerood

Public Lands Coordinator

If you have driven the backroads of Dolores and Montezuma counties in the past few months you most likely noticed some new additions to the landscape – they're tall, shiny, bright at night, and noisy. Yes, those structures are drill rigs probing the earth's crust for natural gas – and they are finding enough to warrant the attention of the federal government, which is



San Juan Citizens Alliance file photo

Prospective gas development of the Gothic Shale formation on San Juan Public Lands could have significant impacts on the region's air quality and other important environmental and public health resources.

likely a better-than-it-could be scenario for all of us.

Though the natural gas development activities in this region are generally referred to as the Gothic Shale play, there are other geologic formations that may yield natural gas as well. Most of the privately held land that overlays these potential sources of natural gas is leased for fluid minerals, as is much of our ad-

acent publicly owned land. While the Montezuma and Dolores county governments have displayed minimal interest in regulating fossil fuel development, the state has stepped in to play a stronger role, as demonstrated with last year's enactment of the enhanced Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission regulations.

The federal government has also taken note of the increase in natural gas exploration on the public lands underlain by the Gothic Shale layer. The San Juan Public Lands Center received input during the process to revise the land management plan for BLM and Forest Service lands overseen by the center. The natural gas industry estimated it would install up to 8,000 well-heads in the region – this in addition to the 1,000-plus already foreseen for the planning area. Evidently SJPL staff examined the data and whittled it down to what they consider to be a more realistic estimate of 1,700 additional wells – still a significantly high number and one that makes additional study of environmental impacts necessary.

Because 1,700 wells is much more than a drop in the bucket, and could very likely result in significant adverse impacts to air quality, visual resources, watershed health, wildlife habitat and more, the land managers decided to initiate a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement to address the proposed development. A key part of this process is determining what the planning baseline will be – a process known as “Reasonable and Forseeable Development” (RFD). Like any planning process, knowing the stature of the project is key to understanding the possible impacts of the project, and therefore the Alliance is keenly interested in learning how SJPL arrived at the 1,700-well figure.

Our concerns on the RFD's determinations are founded in the history of public lands elsewhere in the West,

where RFDs have proven to be off-target and resulted in minimized estimates of well field development. This concern is currently being born out in northwest New Mexico where the RFD for well development is being proven faulty as the industry initiates exploration in geologic strata that was never included in the initial RFD – hence the cumulative impacts of environmental affects were underestimated.

Unfortunately, inadequate or ill-conceived RFDs can have greater consequence than a bad day in math class, because the planning that spins out from an RFD relates to the health and well-being of humans, wildlife, watersheds, air quality, vegetation and more – essentially the entire biologic environment.

We are hopeful that the San Juan Public Lands staff is approaching the Supplemental Draft EIS planning process with the necessary vision and technical acumen to create a planning document that will be a blueprint for natural gas development that does not harm biologic or environmental health. Sadly, most blueprints (or lack thereof) meant to manage natural gas development in the West have been disasters – numerous reports include substantiated stories of watershed degradation, increased air pollution, desecration of cultural sites, decimated critical wildlife habitat, and more.

All of us will have the opportunity to examine the federal agencies' work when they release the Supplemental Draft EIS this spring. We have seen, heard, smelled, lived and tasted inadequate planning of fossil fuel development on our public and private lands before – and we know that better is possible and will be the only outcome acceptable to us. This expectation is not extreme, not radical, nor is it inherently anti-development – rather it follows the basic tenet of human survival and existence: Good stewardship is foundational and whatever you do, “don't soil the nest.” ■

Chimney Rock monument plan advances with draft bill, boundary map

By Josh Joswick
Oil & Gas Organizer

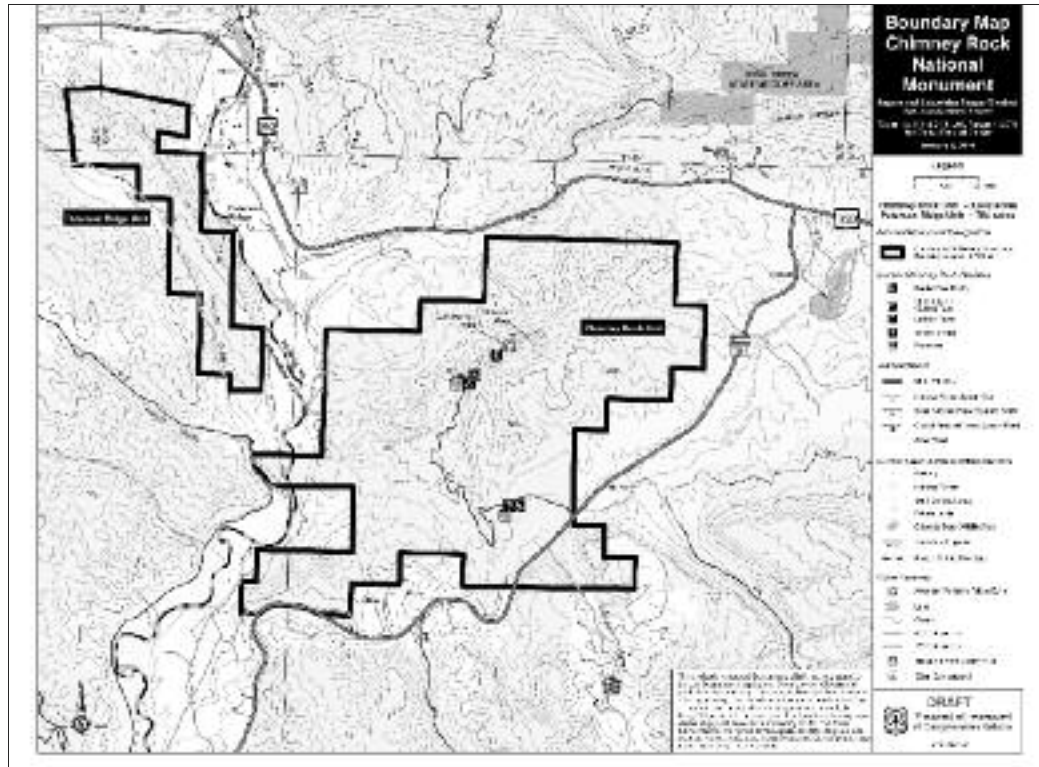
Last fall, the first official public steps were taken to get Chimney Rock Archeological Area recognized as a national monument. If you have ever taken the tour of the area, you would have heard a knowledgeable guide from the Chimney Rock Interpretative Association say that Chimney Rock was designated an Archaeological Area and National Historic Site in 1970 and that it lies on 4,100 acres of San Juan National Forest land surrounded by the Southern Ute Indian Reservation.

One thousand years ago, the site was home to the Chacoan ancestors of the modern Pueblo Indians and is of great spiritual significance to these tribes. Their ancestors built more than 200 homes and ceremonial buildings high above the valley floor, probably to be near the sacred twin rock pinnacles. Of the hundreds of individual sites dotting the landscape, researchers have thus far found 91 structures that may have been permanent buildings, plus 27 work camps near farming areas, adding up to more than 200 individual rooms.

There is also a great view to the south with plenty of solar gain which, according to my theory, is why the Puebloan ancestors chose to live there in the first place. That, and the area's proximity to two state highways.

In January, staff members of U.S. Rep. John Salazar and Sen. Michael Bennet met with the Archuleta County commissioners, San Juan National Forest Supervisor Mark Stiles, and members of the Pagosa Springs Chamber of Commerce to update them on this project, which both elected officials support. Legislation will be needed to make this happen, and that bill has been drafted, was reviewed by those in attendance and is expected to be introduced in Congress soon.

Three main issues were discussed at the meeting: mineral development, view sheds and noise. The last two are essentially Archuleta County concerns. The county's primary objective here is to get a National Monument established, as this will be an economic boon to the county. Corollary to that are the issues of view and noise sheds. The county has valid concerns about how much of a draw a national monument that looks out onto a vast gas patch would be. These concerns will be addressed to the fullest extent possible within the legislation, although extending control to create buffer areas on lands adjacent to the exterior boundaries of the monument will be problematic. Not surprisingly, the Alliance is concerned about



mineral development around the proposed monument, and will advocate for a wide buffer.

The Forest Service presented two maps for discussion purposes. One showed the proposed national monument boundaries and the other showed those boundaries with mineral estate ownership overlaying them. Of significance is that Peterson Ridge, which is the ridge to the west of Chimney Rock, is included on both maps, meaning there are BLM minerals in the Peterson Ridge area. The Forest Service, however, considers Peterson Ridge to be an area of archeological significance, and subsequently is recommending that entry onto Peterson Ridge would be restricted to “scientific” access and not include public access. This also means that the BLM will consider putting no surface occupancy (NSO) conditions on any mineral leases for that area or initiating the withdrawal of federal mineral development rights. There was further discussion about the need to include the NSO stipulation in the legislation, which would effectively make the requirement concrete and non-waivable. That legislative instruction should direct the Secretary of Interior to manage surrounding lands in such a manner as to preserve the integrity of the subject parcel. Whichever of these actions is ultimately decided upon, either administrative or legislative, Peterson Ridge will become a protected area and that is both significant and appreciated.

The two issues that the Alliance had concerns with - mineral development and archeological preservation - are on the radar as this project moves forward. The Alliance will continue to advocate for appropriate conditions and inform our members of the status. ■

House committee holds hearing on San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act

By Amber Kelley

Dolores River Campaign Coordinator

When our last newsletter was delivered to your door, the Alliance was celebrating the very recent introduction of legislation that would protect more than 60,000 acres of pristine wild lands in San Miguel, San Juan, and Ouray counties. As you may recall, U.S. Rep. John Salazar introduced the San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act in the House of Representatives on Oct. 22, 2009.

The legislation would expand the existing Mt. Sneffels and Lizard Head Wilderness areas, establish the McKenna Peak Wilderness, create the Sheep Mountain Special Management Area along the alpine ridge between San Miguel and San Juan counties, and prohibit oil and gas leasing and development in Naturita Canyon. The bill language and maps of the areas proposed for protection can be seen on Rep. Salazar's Web site at www.house.gov/salazar/sjmw.shtml

Senators Mark Udall and Michael Bennet quickly followed Salazar's lead and introduced an identical bill in the Senate on Nov. 10. The bill's introduction in both houses of Congress was an important milestone for the bill.

Then, on Jan. 21, the bill passed another landmark on its trip through Congress. The House Natural Resources Commit-

tee held a hearing on Rep. Salazar's bill. The hearing represented the culmination of more than two years of hard work and collaboration by folks throughout Southwest Colorado. In addition to Salazar and his staff, we have worked closely with the Sheep Mountain Alliance, the Ridgway-Ouray Community Council, the Silverton Mountain School, and the Wilderness Society's Wilderness Support Center throughout the process. The bill would not be what it is without the coordination and great work of these organizations.

In his testimony in support of the bill, Jeff Widen with the Wilderness Support Center said, "Colorado has a long and rich tradition of wilderness protection, with nearly 20 bills enacted over the last 45 years. All of these have shared the characteristics of broad citizen and stakeholder support, bipartisanship, and cooperation among the State's delegation members. The San Juan Mountains Act is carrying on this proud Colorado tradition."

The San Juan Mountains legislation is a great example of how our communities can come together around a common goal. From livestock managers to helicopter-supported skiing operators, from private landowners to motorized and non-motorized recreationists, input was sought from everyone potentially affected by the legislation. In addition to the three

counties in which the proposed wilderness lies, the towns of Telluride, Mountain Village, Ophir, Norwood, Ridgway, and Ouray issued statements of support for the measure, as did the Ridgway Chamber of Commerce and the Telluride Tourism Bureau. Ranchers, homeowners associations, mountain bikers, conservation groups, and outfitters, as well as many residents of the area endorsed the proposal.

It is clear that the San Juan bill has been a true ground-up effort. Widen's testimony told the story of how the bill came to be. "This legislation had its genesis with the interest of San Miguel County citizens in adding deserving wild land areas to the already designated Mt. Sneffels and Lizard Head wildernesses, and adding statutory protection to several other spectacular and qualifying backcountry landscapes. Residents of neighboring counties also advocated protection for deserving contiguous lands outside San Miguel County, and by the spring of 2009, the proposal included lands in three counties (San Miguel, Ouray, and San Juan), and enjoyed nearly uni-



San Juan Citizens Alliance photo

In the committee hearing room, advocates for the San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act pose with Rep. John Salazar's staffer John Whitney. Pictured, from left: Amber Kelley, Whitney, Jeff Widen of The Wilderness Society, and Hilary White from Sheep Mountain Alliance.

OPPOSITE: Kelley, White, Widen and Suzanne Jones of The Wilderness Society, pose in front of the U.S. Capitol before giving testimony.



Alliance Announcements

Annual meeting

5:30-7:30 p.m., Thursday, March 25

Durango Public Library

Join us to elect the 2010 board of directors, hear campaign updates from Alliance organizers, and enjoy dinner and drinks with other members and friends. Please bring a dish to share

Drinks will be provided

New Cortez office

The Alliance's Cortez staff has new digs! To make room for a renovation project in the old Basin Industrial Bank building, the Alliance has relocated its Cortez office. Come check out our new home at 10 W. Main, Suite 110.

Update your e-mail address

If you are not receiving e-mails from us and would like to help the Alliance become more "green," we need your e-mail address. Not only is e-mail correspondence better for the environment, it will help the Alliance save money on printing, paper, postage and staff time each year.

Please contact Tracy Daniels at tracy@sanjuancitizens.org, or (970) 259-3583, and give us your current email address to stay updated on the latest Alliance happenings.

versal support in the region," he said.

In addition to describing the bill's history, Widen's testimony did a great job of describing the need for protection, the values the areas have, and the groundswell of support for the bill. His testimony was submitted to the committee on behalf of numerous conservation groups in Colorado, including San Juan Citizens Alliance.

A witness opposed to the bill spoke about motorized recreation. He was a representative of the Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition and the American Motorcycle Association. Rep. Salazar's staff worked to ensure that conflicts with motorized recreation were

eliminated from areas in the bill, so this witness' testimony was correspondingly lacking in any real meat. His arguments made it clear that he and the organizations he represents are philosophically opposed to wilderness designation, but did not present substantive information pertaining to the San Juan bill itself. It is clear that local communities value wilderness and strongly support this bill, so the impact of this testimony was extremely minimal.

The San Juan Mountains Wilderness Act still has a number of stops on its trip through the congressional process, but there is great potential for its passage by the end of this year or early next. It is

possible that the measure will be included in another public lands omnibus bill, like the one passed last April.

While we were unsuccessful in getting the proposed Snaggletooth area along the Dolores River included in the bill, the Lower Dolores Working Group is discussing the future of that area, and the entire Lower Dolores River corridor between McPhee Dam and the town of Bedrock. This diverse stakeholder group will develop management recommendations by June, including how the river's identified "outstandingly remarkable values" – part of what defines a potentially Wild and Scenic river, should be protected. ■



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