

# San Juan Citizens News

Winter 2001



*Alliance volunteers marvel at some of the old-growth ponderosa pines along the planned access road to a proposed gas well in the HD Mountains roadless area.*

## **Alliance Stalls New Gas Leasing in HD Mountains**

**A** timely protest filed by the San Juan Citizens Alliance derailed plans by the San Juan National Forest to issue new oil and gas leases for 2,000 acres in the HD Mountains southeast of Bayfield. The leases were scheduled for auction at the Bureau of Land Management's November, 2000 lease sale, and included lands near the Piedra River along the Fossett Gulch Road. Coalbed methane development was likely if the leases had been sold.

The Alliance challenged the leases on several grounds, including the fact that the Forest Service had never conducted appropriate environmental studies prior to making these leases available for purchase and development. The Forest Service was relying on the outdated 1983 San Juan Forest Plan, a document that never even mentions the words "coalbed methane," much less talk about impacts from such development. In recent years, we have seen coalbed methane development result in methane seepage which kills large swaths of vegetation such as has occurred in the pinyon-juniper woodlands of the Soda Springs area on the Southern Ute Indian Reservation; dewatering of coal seams with a resultant lowering of water tables; coal bed fires created by the dewatering of coal seams; and coal bed methane migration into domestic water aquifers. In our arguments, we insisted

that these issues be studied in an appropriate Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement before any new leases were issued by the Forest Service or BLM.

The day before the scheduled lease sale, the Forest Service apparently agreed with the inadequacy of their environmental compliance and pulled the two leases from the public auction, safeguarding these 2,000 acres of ponderosa pine forest and pinyon-juniper woodlands from intensive gas exploration for the immediate future. However, we fully anticipate the Forest Service will again attempt to lease these lands at another auction in the coming year. ■

# Director's Column

Mark Pearson  
Executive Director

The past six months have been a time of rapid change and growth for the San Juan Citizens Alliance.

As of January 1, 2001, we officially launched the new Oil and Gas Accountability Project as a separate, stand-alone organization. Gwen Lachelt assumed her role as the full-time director of OGAP (renamed from the more unwieldy Citizens Oil and Gas Support Center), and Travis Stills moved across from the Alliance to serve as OGAP's staff attorney and research director. While we will sorely miss their expertise within the Alliance, Gwen and Travis are still physically located in the same office space right next door to the Alliance's office.

Speaking of the Alliance office, we have a new space! Recognizing the need to accommodate our expanding multiple functions, we jumped at the opportunity to move into a new two-room office. The

office is still within the Gardenswartz Building at 863 1/2 Main Avenue in downtown Durango, but now faces onto 9th Street on the building's north side. We have three, count 'em three, windows and pleasing views of Durango Mountain Park. The new office provides a better utility space for our copier along with ample room for two staffers.

That's right, two staffers. Based on a superb effort by Gwen, the Alliance is one of nine organizations that recently created the Western Coalbed Methane Project to coordinate actions on similar issues facing Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, and Montana. Together, we secured a major grant in the amount of \$210,000 to fund greatly expanded organizing and research efforts. Given the new Bush Administration's stated goal of vastly expanding oil and gas exploitation in the Rocky Mountains and elsewhere, it's not a moment too soon. The Alliance's share of the funding allows us to hire a new staff organizer dedicated to oil and gas issues in the San Juan Basin. We will be welcoming Alan Rolston to this position in April.

Another exciting coalition effort joined by the Alliance is the La Plata Unity Coalition. Last summer, the Alliance sponsored a new community organizing initiative aimed at improving the social and economic conditions of the Latino and immigrant community in Durango. At about the same time, a major Colorado foundation announced a huge new statewide grant program to address mental health and cultural adjustments issues among immigrants. Under the leadership of the Durango Adult Education Center, the La Plata Unity Coalition was quickly pulled together that included not only the Alliance's *Compañeros Latino Resource Center*, but also Southwest Mental Health, Alternative Horizons, Durango 9-R School District, and the Durango Latino Education Coalition. We put together a dynamite coalition proposal that in December was awarded a \$75,000 per year grant over three

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# San Juan Citizens Alliance

[www.sanjuancitizens.org](http://www.sanjuancitizens.org)

*The San Juan Citizens Alliance promotes stable communities that actively recognize and respect social and ecological diversity, increase genuine democracy, and foster social, economic, and environmental justice in the San Juan Basin.*

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years. The Alliance's portion greatly enhances the funding base for the Compañeros project and will allow us to serve an even greater community segment.

We still face our share of challenges. It won't be easy to defeat the billionaires behind the ritzy Piano Creek Ranch resort,

nor simple to overcome the industry bias of the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission. But with the enhanced resources, and redoubled commitment of our amazing volunteers and members, we are rapidly expanding our reach and abilities.

Mark Pearson

## From the President

Carolyn Lamb

*Standing alone, on the mountaintop  
it is easy to realize that whatever special nests we make,  
leaves and moss like the marmots and birds, or tents or piled stone,  
we all dwell in a house of one room,  
the world with the firmament for its roof,  
and are sailing the celestial spaces without leaving any track.  
-John Muir*

I came across this quote by John Muir in a phenomenal book of photographs of the San Juan region called Spirit of the San Juans by Kathleen Norris Cook. The images are breathtaking and inspiring, but as I write this letter, it is Muir's words that ring in my head; "sailing the celestial spaces without leaving any track." That is a beautiful image, one that from a scientific point of view, really is based in fact. The earth careening through the universal atmosphere probably doesn't leave much more of a mark than that of a pebble thrown up in the air.

Muir talks of homes made of leaves and moss or tents or piled stones. These aren't the homes I or my neighbors live in. They would hardly be sturdy or long-lasting enough. But who else but man builds such things. Muir is right, birds and marmots build nests, so too do the beaver and the squirrel. But how long do these dwelling places last? A few years maybe, before one good storm knocks the nest from the tree or floods the den. Man's dwellings are not so superficial, our actions have not been so light-handed with this planet. How long will the scars left from strip mining or clear cutting or golf courses in pristine natural areas last?

Certainly, well beyond the next good storm.

Yet here we are, a gazillion and one species living on a planet that leaves no trace, a one-room dwelling where we are the only roommate leaving his trash out and that keeps building permanent new additions to the one room. Many of us are tired of this roommate. We join organizations and write letters of opposition, we march and lobby and fight. The Alliance is an organization with plenty of members like that. Our little group isn't so little anymore. In fact, our membership has more than doubled in less than two years. And our voices do

make a difference, not just in protecting the natural areas around us, but our own backyards as well as ourselves and our rights. Our actions really do prevent other people's actions that are destructive to our community and to our planet. Not every victory is won, but then again, the battle never really ends.

So I thank every one of you for your support of our causes, especially

***"Our little group isn't so little anymore. In fact, our membership has more than doubled in less than two years."***

to those of you who have taken the time to write a letter or assist on a campaign or speak out at a public hearing. Without this type of membership support our causes would be insurmountable. We have many critical issues before us like the East Fork campaign, immigrant rights, the Animas La Plata project, the National Forest management plan and ongoing controversies over methane production in the San Juan Basin.

I urge you to continue to stay involved with these issues or get involved for the first time. The Alliance is only as successful in its campaigns as its members are willing to support them. Only through strong membership support can the Alliance continue working to protect the trackless areas and do what we can to help erase the scars already made. ■

# Animas-LaPlata Project Squeezes Through Congress

Dylan Norton, San Juan Rivers Task Force

In its last act before slinking back home for the holidays, Congress authorized the latest version of the Animas-La Plata project. Over the vocal objections of environmental groups and local citizens, ALP was included in a last-minute, must-pass spending bill which sailed through final passage in the wake of the climatic election resolution. ALP was one among many special interest and anti-environmental “riders” attached to the mammoth, 450 billion dollar spending bill by influential members of Congress. Although proponents hail their victory as an ringing endorsement of the project, the passage of ALP was merely a result of effective political arm twisting and slick lobbying on the part of ALP proponents.

Contrary to supporters’ claims, the opposition to ALP didn’t spend gobs of money trying to stop the project. Truthfully, environmental groups probably devoted less than ten thousand dollars to fighting ALP this year. That much of our local tax money is spent by the water districts in a busy week. Most of the energy (and funding) for the fight against ALP has come from local people who, for many reasons, believe strongly that the project will hurt our quality of life and our environment. This year, the Alliance, FCAC, and TAR helped organize lobbying trips to DC for nearly two dozen local citizens. Many of these people traveled at their own expense to fight ALP legislation. Unfortunately, their efforts mattered little in the end, as ALP was selected by a few legislators behind closed doors to be included as a rider. The great majority of lawmakers had no voice in the content of the final bill. Unfortunately, money and power triumphed over our grass-roots efforts.

Proponents, many of whom worship ALP as a deity in the water development pantheon, believe it will see funding and construction this time. They may be right, but the project has many hurdles to overcome before the switch is thrown on the pumping plant. And we, the local citizens, have yet to weigh in. Realistically, none of us knows if lawsuits will be effective at preventing construction. There is no doubt that the environmental studies on ALP are deficient and that the legally mandated public process has been a farce. Whether these inadequacies are severe enough to yet again stop project construction remains to be seen. Although Congress authorized ALP, authorization does not give the Bureau of Reclamation any money



*Is this La Plata County’s future if ALP is built?*

with which to begin construction, and the project could always fall victim to funding shortages in the yearly appropriations process. It is likely that the traditional foes

***Animas-La Plata will consume enough electricity to light a million Christmas trees.***

of ALP will continue to fight wasteful appropriations for the project.

Although the federal government has given the nod to ALP, we have yet to approve local participation in the project. Under TABOR, we, the district voters, are entitled to a referendum on project participation. We must consent to the tax increase that will be levied to pay for our share of ALP water. Although a referendum on ALP participation narrowly passed in 1987, the

water in that proposal was predominately destined for agricultural use. As the water allocations and uses have been modified substantially since then, the law mandates a new vote. The demographics in Durango and the ALP water district have changed significantly since 1987, and it seems improbable that the residents would now approve the several million dollars necessary to fund project participation, especially given the lack of benefits in the current proposal. Withdrawing local participation in the project would certainly strike a powerful blow at the unelected water oligarchy which has freely dispensed hundreds of thousands of our tax dollars to lawyers and lobbyists to garner Congressional support for ALP.

Eventually, I like to hope, our society will use our limited financial and natural resources more sensibly. At the same time Congress was approving ALP, the governor of California was rationing power for the state Christmas tree. Animas-La Plata will consume enough electricity to light a million Christmas trees. At some point, we in Colorado will be faced with an energy crisis similar to that which California is currently experiencing. Will we turn off the ALP pumps, or build another coal power plant and further pollute our air in an attempt to keep pace with runaway consumption? ALP passage shows that our politicians are obviously not yet mature enough to confront this issue. Fortunately, we in Durango will have the choice to say no to our participation in ALP. I know how I’ll vote. ■

## Alliance Continues to Track Giant Timber Sale

One of the largest timber sales in recent years continues to grab public attention. During two October field trips, several dozen interested local residents toured Jackson Mountain to learn more about the proposed timber sale, originally envisioned as logging more than 15 million board feet of timber. Jackson Mountain is a low, forested mound just a few miles east of Pagosa Springs and north of Highway 160.



*Alliance members attend a Forest Service-hosted public tour of Jackson Mountain last fall to discuss issues surrounding the proposed timber sale.*

The Forest Service has proposed intensive logging around Jackson Mountain largely to reduce the density of trees, and thereby reduce the threat of future catastrophic fires. In a familiar story, past timber harvest combined with diligent suppression of wild fires has resulted in a forest with a dense understory, and unnatural ratios of tree species. For example, the Forest Service asserts that

white fir have become much more abundant, and ponderosa pine and Douglas fir less abundant, as a result of fire suppression and timber harvest. They hope to alter these ratios by extensively cutting the white fir and then reintroducing fire into the ecosystem once fuel densities are reduced.

The Jackson Mountain sale set off alarm bells with the San Juan Citizens Alliance

and other conservation organizations for a variety of reasons. One major reason was simply the scale of the timber sale – 15 million board feet is more timber than the entire San Juan National Forest cuts in most years these days. We felt that this scale of timber harvest required a more thorough Environmental Impact Statement to analyze its effects, rather than a more limited Environmental Assessment, which is the route the Forest Service took originally.

Conservation groups also worry that the extensive logging of white fir and the mixed conifer ecosystem, followed by reintroduced fire, is still an experimental approach that should not be applied across such a large landscape without more restrictions. Jackson Mountain exhibits unstable geology, with many active and historic landslides, so we also fear further destabilizing the area's slopes with more roads and proposed aspen clearcuts. Residents along Highway 160 below the mountain were also seriously concerned about slope stability.

A portion of the Jackson Mountain sale is proposed to enter the Turkey Creek roadless area, and the top of Jackson Mountain itself contains a 1,000-acre forest which researchers have tagged as a potential research area for investigating the historic role of fire in these ecosystems.

Because of extensive public comment, the Forest Service is significantly revising the Jackson Mountain timber sale. Harvest units located on unstable slopes have already been dropped from the proposal, and further modifications are expected before the Forest Service issues a final decision in early 2001. ■

### **Take Action:**

To receive more information about the Jackson Mountain sale, contact the Pagosa Ranger District, PO Box 310, Pagosa Springs, CO 81147, (970) 264-2268.

## Dolores River Under Siege

As so many Western Colorado rafting devotees know, the Dolores River offers a combination of scenery, whitewater, and remoteness unequaled throughout the Southwest. But now a variety of threats have reared their heads to further degrade this hardworking river's wild characteristics.



Dolores -- the lower Dolores River near Bedrock.

### WETPAK

The Dolores Water Conservancy District (DWCD) has proposed a plan of additional water diversions called Water for Everyone Tomorrow Package (WETPAK). There's just one problem, "everyone" doesn't include recreationists like the rafters, kayakers, and canoers who float the river, nor the anglers and the trout they seek. In typical water development fashion, "everyone" simply means once again the traditional agricultural water diverters and local municipalities.

Among its various features, WETPAK proposes a new 20,000 acre-foot dam on Plateau Creek, the major tributary that creates McPhee Reservoir's north arm. The dam is touted as a solution to an error by the Bureau of Reclamation, which miscalculated the amount of water reserved for maintaining late summer instream trout flows below the reservoir. The Bureau came up about 3,000 acre-feet short in meeting this pool for downstream releases. Hence,

WETPAK's "solution" is another Dolores River system dam to capture the last little bit of snowmelt not already stored by McPhee. Some of this extra captured snowmelt would be sold back to the Bureau to meet the fish pool requirements, and a bunch more would be available for new water diversions.

### Organizing the Boating Community

The San Juan Citizens Alliance has undertaken an effort to organize the left out "everyones" among the private boating community to get a say in water management in the Dolores River system. The Alliance is cooperating closely with Trout Unlimited and Environmental Defense, who this past spring underwrote a hydrologic study of the

Dolores River, conducted by well-respected water engineering firm Hydrosphere. This study found an extra 18,000 acre-feet of unused water in the Dolores. Environmental Defense's Jim Martin concludes, "We can meet the needs for fishery and recreation without harming other water-users — and without building more dams."

Not surprisingly, the DWCD calls the report "fatally flawed" and argues instead that all the water in the Dolores is completely allocated, if not presently used.

### Additional Water Diversions

Apparently spurred by a fear of losing water through lack of use, the DWCD has proposed to purchase 6,000-8,000 acre-feet of surplus water from the Montezuma Valley Irrigation Company (MVIC). The water became surplus from improvements in irrigation efficiency, funded in large part by public taxpayers through the federal salinity control program, and because of loss of agricultural land through subdivision. DWCD wants to apply the water to new, unirrigated lands near Dove Creek, but will need to use the canals and pipelines of the Bureau's Dolores Project. Hence, the Bureau last August prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the contract to carry this water.

***WETPAK's "solution" ... a other Dolores River system dam to capture the last little bit of snowmelt not already stored by McPhee.***

The EA failed to analyze many issues, including impacts on salinity, whether the surplus water is even still owned by MVIC, and impacts to downstream uses like the trout fishery and boating. For reference's sake, 8,000 acre-feet of water equals enough water for five days of flows at 800 cfs, or one-sixth of the entire year 2000 boating season. Taking this much additional water from the Dolores will have severe impacts on boaters particularly. ■

## Dolores River Livestock Trailing

Another issue under scrutiny is a proposal to trail hundreds of cattle along the Dolores River between Bradfield Bridge and Slickrock as part of a recreational dude ranching operation. The proposal is in three parts:

– Run 200 cattle plus 6 clients and 3 cowboys from Doe Canyon (mile 5 below Bradfield Bridge) to the Dove Creek Pump Station during July and August;

– Run 200-400 cattle plus 6 clients and 3 cowboys from Dove Creek Pump Station to Slickrock during the first week of November;

– Run 200-400 cattle plus 6 clients and 3 cowboys in the area west of Slickrock, away from the Dolores River, during winter months November-April;

As we went to press, District Ranger Mike Znerold announced that BLM had denied the cattle trailing permit because of strong opposition by rafters and kayakers, and because of potential ecological impacts. He invited the ranchers to resubmit a proposal focused on the uplands areas west of Slickrock instead. ■

## Take Action

### Contact the Bureau of Reclamation

You can write to the Bureau's Grand Junction office with comments on the Dolores Carriage Contract EA. The address is: Carol DeAngelis, Area Manager, Bureau of Reclamation, Western Colorado Area Office, 2764 Compass Drive, Suite 106, Grand Junction, CO 81506 or email: CDEANGELIS@uc.usbr.gov

Ideas for comments could include a reminder to the Bureau that it, and not DWCD, is charged by the public with managing McPhee Reservoir for all of the Dolores project's purposes including downstream recreation and fishing. Also encourage the Bureau to fully disclose the environmental impacts of more water diversions via a thorough Environmental Impact Statement, and tell the Bureau to incorporate safeguards into any carriage contract agreement to allocate some of the surplus water for improving the late summer trout fishery and for recreational boating flows.

### Volunteer at Bradfield Bridge

Once again this spring we will be organizing volunteers to contact boaters at the Dolores River launch sites, including Bradfield Bridge, the Dove Creek Pump Station, and perhaps Slickrock or Bedrock. We need folks willing to handout literature and obtain names and addresses for our growing boater contact list — presently 175 and counting. If you are willing to spend a weekend morning in April or May talking with boaters, even as you are rigging your own gear, please contact Mark Pearson at (970) 259-3583.

## Compañeros Joins La Plata Unity Coalition

The Alliance's Compañeros Latino Resource Center played a key role in forming the La Plata Unity Coalition in November. The coalition was spurred by a successful grant application to the Colorado Trust to fund a three-year program to assist refugees and immigrants in their cultural adjustment to the United States. Joining Compañeros in this successful effort were the Adult Education Center, Durango Latino Education Center, Southwest Mental Health Center, and Alternative Horizons.

The Colorado Trust funding provides a major boost to the core goal of Compañeros — protecting and expanding Latino rights and culture in the Four Corners. Compañeros was launched by the San Juan Citizens Alliance in 2000 to provide an organizing presence among the Latino community, and to ensure that the civil rights of both long-time and recent Latino residents were recognized and enhanced.

With the funding, Compañeros coordinator Olivia Lopez has already held several workshops in conjunction with the Adult Education Center titled "Bienvenidos a Los Estados Unidos," or "Welcome to America." These workshops go through the many basics of adjusting to a new culture, from simple things like knowing to call "911" in emergencies to how to apply for a drivers license or obtain medical services. The first workshop was attended by more than 30 recent immigrants. Additional workshops will be scheduled every other month to teach people their basic civil rights.

Another key objective of Compañeros is urging Durango's community service providers, including Mercy Medical Center, the courts, and mental health centers, to provide bilingual services or interpreters for people in need. Compañeros will be hosting seminars with community professionals to discuss ways of meeting these needs for the community.

Compañeros also plans to assist immigrants through a cadre of volunteer "compañeros" or companions. Volunteers are being organized to assist immigrants in finding access to mental health, child care, medical, or other needed services. Compañeros is also working to ensure that immigrants are not denied services rightfully due them, such as workers compensation when injured on the job.

Compañeros is directed by a volunteer steering committee similar to the Alliance's other issue task forces. One goal of Compañeros is to recruit more Latino participation in Durango's business and civic organizations.

Compañeros is an exciting new direction for the Alliance, reaching out to a portion of our community where we have previously expended little effort at organizing. To volunteer as a Compañeros, call Olivia Lopez at (970) 375-9406. ■

## Alliance Initiates Roadless Area Inventory

The Alliance last summer embarked on an ambitious new effort to inventory the half-million acres of roadless areas on the San Juan National Forest. Most of us are extremely familiar with these undeveloped, and unprotected, lands scattered across the San Juan National Forest:

- Hermosa, the largest unprotected roadless area in the entire state and a favorite backyard recreation area;
- San Miguel, the indescribably scenic peaks and alpine lakes of Ice Lake Basin, Mineral Creek, and upper Cascade Creek north of Molas Pass;
- HD Mountains, rugged ridges with pockets of old-growth ponderosa pine at the lowest elevations of the San Juan National Forest near Bayfield.

It may come as a surprise that no detailed inventory of roadless areas exists for the San Juan National Forest. The Forest Service relies largely on the 20-year-old data collected during the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE) studies of the 1970s. But even those studies never carefully mapped and photographed the roads, timber sales, irrigation ditches, mines, and other developments that define the periphery of roadless areas.

In conjunction with a dozen other groups around Colorado operating under the umbrella of the Southern Rockies Forest Network, the Alliance has committed to a thorough field inventory of roadless areas in the San Juan Mountains. Last August, we completed our first roadless area inventory – the Fish Creek Roadless Area on the West Fork of the Dolores. Fish Creek drains the lower slopes of the Wilson Mountains, and includes widespread aspen and spruce forests, and dense elk herds. We started with Fish Creek because the area was never inventoried for its roadless characteristics, even by the Forest Service in the 1970s.

The inventory process starts with a review of aerial photos maintained by the Forest Service. Roads, clearcuts, and other features visible on the photos are transferred to USGS topographic maps. Then we go to the field and travel every vehicle route visible on the photos or discovered on the ground. We carefully photograph each road or other human-constructed feature, and note these photo points in the appropriate location on the maps.



*Fish Creek -- The Alliance completed a field inventory of the 10,000-acre Fish Creek Roadless Area during August, 2000.*

When finished, we have a thorough inventory, carefully documented with maps and photos, that allows for the definition of the roadless area boundary. This information will help guide future efforts to protect

roadless areas from timber sales, oil and gas leases, and other inappropriate development and help form the basis of future wilderness protection campaigns. ■

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### Seasonal Position:

The Alliance will be moving into a full-scale roadless inventory in the spring and summer of 2001. We will be hiring at least one seasonal worker to undertake the lion's share of the field work, beginning in May or June. If you are interested, please contact the Alliance office at (970) 259-3583.

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## San Juan National Forest Resumes Plan

After a several year hiatus the San Juan National Forest will resume work on its long overdue revision of its Land and Resource Management Plan. The "Forest Plan" is the document which essentially zones the San Juan National Forest into priority uses ranging from ski areas to backcountry recreation to timber harvest to winter wildlife range. The present plan dates to 1983, and the Forest Service is required to revise its Forest Plans every 15 years.



*Molas Pass -- The snowy expanse of Molas Pass appeals to skiers, snowshoers, and snowmobilers. Forest Service action on a management plan to reduce conflicts between the groups is still on hold.*

The San Juan Citizens Alliance and allies have crafted a citizens alternative vision for the future of the San Juan National Forest. We've titled this the Citizens Plan for the Wild San Juans. Our Citizens Plan emphasizes:

- Protecting and restoring large, wild, core habitats;
- Returning the native species such as lynx, wolverine, wolf, and grizzly bear;
- Securing critical landscape corridors;
- Living, working, and playing in harmony with native species and wild habitats.

Through our plan, we hope to retain more than half the San Juan National Forest in undeveloped categories that emphasize wilderness, backcountry recreation, and research natural areas. In our view, this approach should best serve the needs of wildlife species most sensitive to human disturbance, such as lynx and wolverine. Many hundreds of thousands of acres will still be available for motorized access, livestock grazing, restoration forestry, and other more intensive human activities.

In the coming year, the Forest Service will begin drafting alternatives for its plan revision, including our Citizens Plan in addition to competing visions. In the meantime, we will continue to organize local support for our plan to add to the several dozen businesses and organizations already on board as official endorsers.

## Project Updates

### *Molas Pass Winter Use Plan – Still No Decision*

Almost two years after the issue first raised its head, the Forest Service still has made no decision on managing conflicts between motorized and non-motorized winter recreation users at Andrews Lake and Molas Pass. The San Juan NF put out various alternatives for public comment in the fall of 1999. They originally promised to have a plan in place last winter, and now another winter is quickly passing without any action. Agency officials promise to release "any day" their decision on a more harmonious means of accommodating skiers, snowshoers, and snowmobilers.

### *Silverton Ski Areas*

Two competing ski area proposals for public lands near Silverton are the subject of a new BLM study. The BLM is accepting comments on a Notice of Realty Action (NORA) for the ski areas proposed for Cement Creek, Gladstone, and Boulder Gulch are north of Silverton. One proposal is a low-key, extreme skier venture proposed by Aaron Brill and Core Mountain Enterprises, LLC. The other proposal by Velocity Peak, Inc. is much more grandiose, and envisions turning Silverton into a new resort community. The NORA is a very preliminary step in BLM's approval process. Once BLM analyzes the proponent's formal applications, BLM will move on to the next step of preparing a complete Environmental Impact Statement on one or both proposal. Comments will be accepted by BLM until March 12, 2001. Call Charlie Higby at BLM, 970-385-1374 for more information. ■

### **Take Action:**

To get on the Forest Service's mailing list for the Forest Plan revision, contact Thurman Wilson, San Juan National Forest, 15 Burnett Court, Durango, CO 81301, (970) 247-4874. If you would like to help promote the Citizens Plan for the Wild San Juans, call the San Juan Citizens Alliance at (970) 259-3583.

# Alliance Joins Western Coalbed Methane Project

by Gwen Lachelt, Oil & Gas Accountability Project

The Rocky Mountain West faces one of the greatest environmental threats of our time – coalbed methane (CBM) development. Regions of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming are serving as America's guinea pigs for the experimental development of coalbed methane (a so-called alternative fuel because it is a source of gas).

In order to produce methane from coal seams, massive amounts of groundwater must be pumped from underground aquifers, coal seams are fractured with toxic fluids to stimulate production, and a web of roads and pipelines are constructed to deliver the product to market.



One of La Plata County's thousands of gas wells perched above the Animas River.

Thousands of wells and roads have scarred the landscape, denuded wildlife habitat, contaminated drinking water, and methane and hydrogen sulfide seeps have forced some families from their homes. Domestic and stock wells have dried up and billions of barrels of produced water (often high in sodium, arsenic, and other contaminants) are being dumped on the surface and into rivers. Underground coal fires are the latest problem among a laundry list of devastating impacts.

With tens of thousands of CBM wells proposed for public, private, and tribal lands across the West, this is a critical time for citizen and environmental groups to join together in a coordinated fashion to aggressively challenge CBM development and its destructive impacts.

## Coalition Members

Nine organizations from across the West have established the Western Coalbed Methane Project (WCBMP) to aggressively challenge CBM development in the West. Along with the San Juan Citizens Alliance,

participating groups are Oil & Gas Accountability Project (WCBMP coordinator), Native Action, Northern Plains Resource Council, Powder River Basin Resource Council, Southern Colorado CURE, Southern Utah Grassroots Organization, Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, and Wyoming Outdoor Council.

## Project Goals

The Western Coalbed Methane Project seeks to dispel the industry-perpetuated myth that natural gas is clean energy. The promotion of coalbed methane as clean energy is not only undermining efforts to pursue conservation and renewable energy systems but also is forcing regions of our country to become

**... "this is a critical time for citizen and environmental groups to join together" ... "to aggressively challenge CBM development" ...**

national sacrifice areas.

The goals and objectives of our Western Coalbed Methane Project campaign are to ensure that CBM development proceeds only when surface and groundwater are protected and when the cumulative impacts

of thousands of CBM wells, roads, pipelines, hydraulic fracturing procedures, and water disposal wells are understood. Our focus includes: Challenging inappropriate development and enforcing existing laws; Changing policy at the federal, state, tribal, and local level; and, Building the capacity of our groups to effectively address CBM development.

## Where in the West is Coalbed Methane Development Happening?

### San Juan Basin

In the San Juan Basin of southwestern Colorado and northern New Mexico, thousands of wells and roads have scarred the landscape, denuded wildlife habitat, contaminated drinking water, and methane and hydrogen sulfide seeps have forced some families from their homes. Underground coal fires are the latest problem among a laundry list of devastating impacts. The oil and gas industry just received state and federal agency approval to double the number of allowable gas wells in Colorado's San Juan Basin.

### Powder River Basin

The Powder River Basin in Wyoming and Montana is slated for 70,000 to 90,000 gas wells - the largest energy development proposed in North America. Wyoming ranchers have had their domestic and stock wells dry up and have watched their valuable land erode before their eyes as companies discharge huge amounts of produced water at gas well drilling sites. The produced water, often high in sodium, arsenic, and other contaminants, is polluting nearby streams. The loss of water and poor resulting water quality threatens to shut down agriculture and ranching operations in areas

of the Powder River Basin. In the words of an expert geologist, there is no single greater threat to the citizens and families of Wyoming than coalbed methane extraction.

### Raton Basin

In the Raton Basin of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico, oil and gas companies hope to drill hundreds, possibly thousands, more coalbed methane wells. Methane development in the Raton Basin is depleting the only drinking water source for many residents and the responsible companies and state agencies have taken little action to address this serious problem. Wells, roads, pipelines, and noise from compressor stations and other facilities have transformed this once tranquil region into an industrial zone.

### Uinta Basin

In the Uinta Basin of eastern Utah, over 200 coalbed methane wells have been drilled. Plans to fully develop Utah's CBM reserves on public lands are currently delayed by environmental impact studies.

### Natural Gas – Clean Energy or Filthy Fuel?

As America struggles to meet its energy demands and reduce air pollution, coalbed

methane (a source of natural gas) is being promoted by the oil and gas industry as a clean, alternative fuel.

At a recent worldwide oil and gas industry symposium on coalbed methane (CBM), speakers announced plans for accelerated development of this so-called “environmentally-friendly” fuel. Adding insult to injury, Congress is responding to high oil prices by considering tax incentives to spur “alternative” fuels production in the Western United States and legislation to open more public lands to this destructive development.

As stated in a 1993 Greenpeace report, “To describe natural gas as a clean-burning, non-polluting fuel is to either minimize or completely ignore its total fuel cycle impacts - beginning with initial seismic surveys, drilling, production, processing, and distribution - all the way through to the final combustion process. Even a cursory look at these impacts dispels the notion that natural gas is a clean fuel.” (Natural Gas: Bridging Fuel or Roadblock to Clean Energy by Carol Alexander). We must work to dispel the industry-perpetuated myth that natural gas is a clean fuel alternative and point out accelerated CBM development is undermining efforts to pursue renewable energy sources.

### Will Citizen Action Make a Difference?

Absolutely! Citizen groups have already been successful on a number of fronts to reduce the impacts of CBM development. While much remains to be done, the employment of the organizing philosophy, “endless pressure endlessly applied” is working.

Groups have successfully organized to establish county regulation of oil and gas development; force public lands agencies to complete environmental impact studies; pressure state oil and gas commissions to conduct baseline testing of water wells and map old oil and gas wells not properly plugged and abandoned that were contributing contamination of water sources. Grassroots organizing efforts have also forced companies to stop illegally dumping produced water in rivers, irrigation ditches and spreading it on roads for dust control. Produced water, often containing toxic and hazardous chemicals, has also been found to contain benzene and toluene, known carcinogens. Groups are also challenging oil and gas industry domination of state oil and gas boards. ■

## Landowner Workshops

by Travis Stills, Oil & Gas Accountability Project

In October, the Alliance held its first landowner workshop in cooperation with the Oil and Gas Accountability Project. The number of participants in the workshop made for an effective workshop. It was announced only to Alliance members and about 30 people attended.

The workshops are designed to increase landowners' knowledge of oil and gas issues and promote cooperation among neighbors faced with oil and gas development. Several Alliance members and staff conducted the meeting with a lively group of participants adding a great deal of experience and information to the meeting.

Terry Fitzgerald described the drilling and operation of a well and development of associated pipelines, roads, treatment facilities, and compressor stations. Terry stressed that the drilling of the well may bring 2-4 weeks of unbearable noise and

fumes, but that the operation of the gas field will probably continue for 20-30 years.

Jack Scott discussed his experience with unscrupulous landmen and described how he uses audio and video to document meetings with the land men. It was agreed that if the industry representative is open and honest, they should be willing to allow recording devices during any discussions.

Travis Stills, provided information on oil and gas law in Colorado, dispelling the declining industry-perpetuated myth that oil and gas have unlimited authority when

they own a mineral estate. Stills quoted from the Colorado Supreme Court Case, *Gerrity v. Magness* to make the point that under Colorado common law mineral estates can only do what is “reasonable and necessary.” In the absence of statutes, regulations, or lease provisions to the contrary, unless the conduct of an operator in accessing, exploring, drilling, and using the surface is reasonable and necessary to the development of the mineral interest, the conduct is a trespass. He also pointed out that the Colorado Supreme Court recognizes that operators must adopt reasonable alternatives in many situations: “[W]hen the operations of a lessee or other holder of mineral rights would preclude or impair uses by the surface owner, and when reasonable alternatives are available to the lessee, the doctrine of reasonable surface use requires the lessee to adopt an alternative means.” Last, he read the language that dispels the myth that mineral interests reign

*Continued from page 11*

legally supreme: “[O]ur cases have consistently emphasized that both estates must exercise their rights in a manner consistent with the other. Hence, in a practical sense, both estates are mutually dominant and mutually servient because each is burdened with the rights of the other.”

Stills also questioned the assumption that surface use agreements are good for every landowner. He said that the wisdom of entering into a surface use agreement depends on several factors including, terms in the severance and other documents that

set out rights between the surface and the mineral owners, the terms of the proposed agreement, and protections set out by state and federal statute, local regulations, and court-made common law.

All participants emphasized that how to deal with industry and whether or not to enter a surface use agreement is an important legal decision that could affect how people own their land and that each landowners’ situation will vary according to the various private agreements involved with divided mineral and surface ownership.

The workshop closed with an open discussion that confirmed that Alliance

members are quite savvy in oil and gas matters. The participants brought up important points, not the least of which is that other Alliance members and neighbors and are important sources of information and support when the landman comes knocking at the door.

The workshop was enthusiastically received by the landowners in attendance. The Alliance and the Oil and Gas Accountability Project are planning to host more of these workshops. Please call the Alliance at 970-259-3583 and register your interest in participating in or hosting the next workshop. ■

## ***Court Upholds County’s Right to Regulate***

A long-awaited court ruling was finally issued in early March on the authority of La Plata County to regulate the surface impacts of oil and gas development.

The Alliance intervened in this lawsuit in 1998 when the oil and gas industry and the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission joined forces in suing La Plata County over incremental protections for landowners. Industry objected to the county’s regulations that were designed to gain better and more orderly land use by allowing surface owners the ability to determine the site of a new gas well. If the industry failed to agree, the County provided a process by which the two sides could mediate their differences. If they failed to reach agreement, the matter would come before the Commissioners and they would resolve the siting of the gas well.

The court, in a ruling by District Judge David Dickinson, overturned these specific regulations on very narrow grounds. However, in doing so, he strongly upheld the county’s authority to regulate oil and gas development: “the County has land-use authority to regulate well siting based upon impacts to adjoining owners and the community, environmental issues, and planned and orderly development of land.”

The judge decided the County’s authority could not be delegated to individual landowners, however, and thus struck down

the specific provisions allowing landowners to determine well locations.

The Alliance’s Oil and Gas Task Force will be brainstorming approaches for revising the county’s regulations to meet the conditions of the judge’s ruling, while still taking full advantage of the county’s land-use regulation authority.

Although industry has characterized this decision as a win for them, and this is true in a very narrow sense, the decision actually gives the full weight of the court’s authority to La Plata County’s ability to rigorously protect surface owner rights as oil and gas development proceeds. This will have major ramifications for Archuleta County as well.

### ***BLM Lawsuit***

In the second suit, the Alliance joined with the Southern Ute Grassroots Organization in February, 2000 to sue the Bureau of Land Management for its failure to update its Environmental Impact Statements and management plans to reveal the new impacts and new drilling plans that have developed in the last decade.

The BLM and Department of Justice continue to evade allegations made in federal court by the San Juan Citizens Alliance and the Southern Ute Grassroots Organization. The Alliance and SUGO filed the lawsuit to force the BLM to release the long-stalled

and long-overdue Environmental Impact Statement for oil and gas development in Southwest Colorado. The Southern Ute Indian Tribe and Amoco intervened in the defense of the BLM’s position that they could go business-as-usual without updated EISs and land use plans. The government’s attorneys in the suit have refused to assemble and produce documents that the court will review to make a ruling in the case.

### ***Southern Ute EIS Finally Released***

As a result of a decade of citizen pressure and the lawsuit, BLM released a draft Environmental Impact Statement for oil and gas operations on the Southern Ute Indian Reservation. Unfortunately, BLM has failed to adequately address many of the problems caused by coalbed methane. Public comment period will be open until mid-March. The Alliance will be participating in this EIS process led by efforts of the Oil and Gas Task Force. ■

**The Alliance Needs Office  
Equipment**

**- two chairs and a desk**

# PIANO CREEK RANCH APPLIES FOR WETLANDS PERMIT

In January, Piano Creek Ranch applied to the Army Corps of Engineers for a permit to dredge and fill wetlands and the San Juan River's East Fork. This is likely the most significant permit Piano Creek Ranch will require to move forward with its grandiose plans for a luxury resort comprised of an 18-hole golf course, 30 trophy homes, dozens of luxury cabins, an 80,000 square-foot lodge, private ski runs, lighted tennis courts, and all of the associated infrastructure – roads, power station, sewage treatment plant, and so forth.

Piano Creek Ranch's proposed golf course sits smack dab in the middle of wetlands and meadows next to the river. They need approval to discharge almost 23,000 cubic yards of fill into 2.76 acres of wetlands. Piano Creek Ranch also plans to dump 243,000 cubic yards of dredged and fill material into the river as it recontours 2.6 miles of the river. The proposed river recontouring is contemplated as mitigation for filling the wetlands. However, a previous demonstration project on the upper mile of the East Fork as it enters the ranch failed to achieve its desired goals of creating new off-channel wetlands.

The Army Corps of Engineers (COE) took public comments for approximately 75 days this winter. Hundreds of concerned citizens, including many from Pagosa Springs and Archuleta County, weighed in with comments about the project. Many commenters requested two major actions by the COE: 1) that the COE **hold public hearings** in Pagosa Springs, Durango, and Creede because of public interest and controversy as evidenced by the 900 public comments submitted last year on the previous Forest Service document; and 2) that the COE must prepare a **full-fledged Environmental Impact Statement** that evaluates all of the impacts associated with the development.

The latter point is a key area of concern. In its application, Piano Creek Ranch claims that the entire purpose of the resort is to build a golf course. Without the golf course, Piano Creek Ranch says, the entire resort is economically unfeasible. Because the resort depends on the golf course, and the golf course depends on the COE's wetlands permit, that means the COE must analyze the environmental impacts of all of the resort's impacts, not just those associated with the golf course and river recontouring.

## ALTERNATIVES UNDER DISCUSSION

The wetlands permit application will consider 5 alternatives ranging from doing nothing (No Action) to the full-scale development (Piano Creek Ranch's preferred action). One alternative would propose deletion of the golf course. However, in their application, Piano Creek Ranch makes crystal clear that this entire project is about golfing:

*“Since golf was identified as the key element in their [Piano Creek Ranch] inclusion in the proposed project, the exclusion of golf would make the project economically infeasible due to loss of members.”*

In addition, Piano Creek Ranch says that the founding members are likely to use their trophy homes **only 3.2 weeks** each year on average. That makes the prospect of obliterating one of Colorado's last mountain valleys for a few weeks of summer golfing by a handful of out-of-state residents the height of arrogance.

In its analysis, the COE must weigh the project's benefits against its **“reasonably foreseeable detriments.”** In our comments, we urged that the COE consider all of the **direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts** associated with the wetlands disturbance and the project, which include:

Impacts to wildlife, including disrupting elk migration and calving;

Impacts to threatened and endangered species such as lynx;

Air quality degradation from hundreds of wood stoves and traffic;

Water quality impacts from sewage wastewater discharges or underground sewage effluent migration, snowplowing, chemical roadbed additives, construction, and dredging and filling activities;

Loss of public fishing access along the East Fork;

Independent economic analysis that the project is infeasible without the golf course;

Effects of increased traffic, population, and recreation usage on adjacent national forests and wilderness areas; Aesthetic impacts from turning a pastoral valley into a golf resort;

Lack of realistic winter access to service a resort of this size;

Lack of electricity and other utility services into the valley;

Damaging the “needs and welfare” of the American public;

The Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife and other agencies must be included in the EIS process as cooperating agencies.

## What's Happening at East Fork Valley?

**T**he ritzy Piano Creek Ranch luxury resort continues to plague the East Fork Valley's future. The Friends of East Fork, led by the San Juan Citizens Alliance, achieved significant victories the past year in delaying the misguided resort, but the developers continue to plug away.



*East Fork -- Long-time stalwart volunteer Lolita Manring helps with food preparation at an East Fork Celebration Day held September 16 in the Pagosa Springs Town Park. More than 100 local residents stopped by to express their love for the East Fork in its presently undeveloped condition, and their opposition to the proposed Piano Creek Ranch luxury resort.*

As a quick refresher, the Piano Creek Ranch is proposed as a private club with approximately 300 members paying anywhere from \$500,000 to \$750,000 to join. The resort is proposed for a private 2,800-acre ranch located along the scenic East Fork of the San Juan River, east of Pagosa Springs. This ranch is the only private land in the entire 20-mile long East Fork Valley. In the late 1980s, the ranch owner, Dan McCarthy, proposed a massive commercial ski resort that ultimately succumbed to financial pressures. Now, out-of-state developers have reached a deal with McCarthy to turn the East Fork into a private retreat for some of America's wealthiest individuals.

The Piano Creek Ranch (PCR) resort will include an 18-hole golf course, a dozen private ski runs, individual trophy homes for up to 30 "founding" investors, a 100,00-

square-foot lodge, up to 75 condominium units for run-of-the-mill club members, lighted tennis courts, and all the associated

utilities – power, sewage, water, etc.

The resort greatly concerns local Pagosa residents and conservationists statewide because of its potential to destroy one of the most critical wildlife corridors in the San Juans,

and because it will create in essence an entire new town in a presently uninhabited valley. Air and water quality will be threatened, and Pagosa residents already under siege by rampant luxury development will be faced with yet more transitory third- and fourth-home owners.

***"In November, the East Fork Valley was named at a national press conference one of America's ten most endangered landscapes by Scenic America."***

## Road Access

Friends of East Fork scored a major victory in July, 2001 when Piano Creek Ranch abruptly withdrew its pending permit application to obtain year-round access from the Forest Service. The dirt road into the East Fork Valley is managed by the Forest Service, and is unplowed during the winter, with only snowmobiles and skiers allowed on it. The PCR developers wanted to take over the road, improve it and keep it open year-round. When the Forest Service requested public comment on this proposal last spring, more than 450 people wrote comments urging preparation of a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement disclosing all of the impacts from the resort's development, not just the road upgrades. When the developers learned the Forest Service was intending to require preparation of a lengthy and expensive EIS, PCR dropped its road application permit.

Consequently, access to the ranch and the proposed luxury resort is still the same for the developers and their billionaire clients as it is for everyone else, i.e. only over-the-snow travel via snowmobile, snowcat, or skis during winter. It remains to be seen if this is a realistic long-term access plan for the resort.

## Sewage Treatment Plant

### Application

PCR's consulting engineers submitted an application for a sewage treatment plant permit to the Colorado Water Quality Control Division in October, 2000. Several dozen interested citizens wrote comments on the permit application, and raised questions about the plant's location relative to the 100-year flood plain, lack of vehicular access to the site during winter, lack of electrical power, and other issues critical to the operation of a sewage treatment plant. As a result of these comments, the state requested additional information from PCR's consultants and a revised sewage treatment plant application is expected soon.

### PCR in the News

Our efforts to bring state and national attention to the fight continue to bear fruit. In November, the East Fork Valley was

named at a national press conference one of America's ten most endangered landscapes by Scenic America. The Denver Post provided extensive news and editorial coverage of the East Fork's selection.

The February, 2001 issue of Backpacker magazine carried an excellent article entitled *Golf or Grizzlies?* that highlighted the threat posed to the South San Juan Wilderness and the area's abundant wildlife by PCR.

Our campaign against PCR gained national attention in USA Today as well. A September, 2000 feature about high-end resorts prominently described our efforts to keep the East Fork Valley free from golf

courses and trophy homes in contrast to resorts planned for other locations.

Last summer, PCR was selected by Colorado Public Interest Research Group to the Colorado Sprawl of Shame, a list of the most destructive residential and commercial developments planned for Colorado. Extensive news coverage in state and local papers followed this selection.

### *PCR Tries to Censor Alliance Website*

PCR's latest salvo against Friends of East Fork generally and San Juan Citizens Alliance specifically was a harassing letter

sent by a Minneapolis law firm demanding we remove the words "Piano Creek Ranch" from our website's meta tag. Meta tags are what Internet search engines look at when responding to search requests, and PCR apparently finds it galling that prospective buyers searching the web get directed to information critical of the resort on our website.

Our pro bono attorneys politely refused PCR's demand to censor our website, pointing out the protections of the First Amendment and related court rulings. If you'd like to see what the fuss is about, visit our website at [www.sanjuancitizens.org](http://www.sanjuancitizens.org). ■

## **Piano Creek Ranch Requests Subdivision Approval**

The developers of the proposed Piano Creek Ranch luxury resort in the East Fork Valley have submitted a subdivision application to Mineral County. They propose to create a single, 150-acre lot located in the middle of the East Fork Valley to accommodate up to 30 trophy homes. The new lot is needed to bring the development into compliance with Mineral County planning and zoning regulations, because the present resort zoning does not allow single-family homes.

The 150-acre Founders at East Fork Subdivision, within the larger 2,780-acre ranch, will be jointly owned by the "founding investors" of Piano Creek Ranch. This parcel makes possible the extravagant trophy homes envisioned by the resort's initial investors. In addition, the golf course, lodge, ski runs, condos, employee housing, wastewater treatment plant, and other facilities of the surrounding resort are still in the works.

Mineral County will be evaluating this subdivision application over the next couple of months and requests public comment on the proposal, both in writing and in person.

### **Development Larger Than County Seat**

PCR's proposed resort is intended to accommodate 530 people at one time, according to PCR's water engineering consultants. This is a greater population than the entire town of Creede, the county seat of Mineral County. The proposed

development will create in essence a new town, in an entirely undeveloped valley, larger than the present county seat.

Piano Creek Ranch's (PCR) application is woefully inadequate. PCR included a voluminous amount of material in its application, but cleverly withheld significant information. PCR copied in its subdivision application dozens of pages excerpted from the 1987 EIS for the failed East Fork Ski Area proposal, but omitted the two most critical portions: 1) the Record of Decision which included the Forest Service's preconditions for the ski area; 2) the mitigation requirements agreed to by the proponent at the time, East Fork Joint Ventures. At a minimum, Mineral County should hold Piano Creek Ranch to the same mitigation requirements agreed to by East Fork Joint Ventures in 1987.

### **Key Issues**

**Air Quality** – the number of fireplaces in the East Fork Valley was limited to 50 by the Colorado Air Pollution Control Division in the 1987 EIS, based on concerns about air pollution impacts at Pagosa Springs from inversions. Now PCR wants approval for 157 fireplaces for only 30 homes! That's five fireplaces per home!

**Wildlife** – in the 1987 EIS, the proponent agreed to an extensive wildlife mitigation plan that included: 1) studies to determine impacts on big game migration, calving, and other ranges resulting from base area development; 2) seasonal restrictions on construction activities; 3) surveys for

threatened & endangered species. PCR should be required to meet the same conditions.

**Dogs** – the previous proponent, East Fork Joint Ventures, agreed to a prohibition on dogs in the valley kept by employees and residents to minimize wildlife harassment. PCR should agree to the same condition.

**Access** – PCR is limited to the same access as that enjoyed by the general public, namely only over-the-snow travel by snowmobile or snowcat during winter months. PCR accepted this level of access when it abandoned its special use permit application pending before that Forest Service in July, 2000. Is luxury home development realistic with snowmobile-only access half the year?

**Emergency Services** – Given limited winter access, what are Mineral County's responsibilities for providing law enforcement, ambulance, and other emergency services to the subdivision? Will Mineral County permanently station a snowmobile on the access road for deputy and paramedic use during winter?

**Utilities** – no electrical power lines presently service the valley for the proposed subdivision or wastewater treatment or water treatment facilities. What is the proposed power source for the subdivision?

**Other Permits** – the 1987 EIS required as a condition evidence that permits required by the Army Corps of Engineers, Colorado Water Quality Control Division, and other permitting authorities had been approved. ■

## **The Durango Mountain Resort Expansion**

*Jonathan Blair*

Gary Derck, Chief Executive Officer of Durango Mountain Resort has big plans for his corporation, one of the largest developments that La Plata County has ever seen. The 650-acre development will include 1,735 dwelling units and seven villages stretching from Needles to Cascade Village on both sides of Highway 550. If this development goes through it will have a permanent impact on Durango's small town atmosphere.

Durango Mountain Resort (DMR) will be have homes, condos, and executive home sites that will cover both sides of Highway 550. There will be areas of open space, in small areas around the development.

The DMR Proposal depicts eight direct development effects.

- Habitat alteration and loss;
- Disruption of migration corridors;
- Increases in noise and human activities during construction;
- Decreases in water quality;
- Decreases in air quality;
- Individuals killed during construction;
- Wildlife avoidance of development area and;
- Human/wildlife encounters.

The DMR Proposal also mentions indirect effects such as degradation of flora/fauna

habitats from human activities. For example, off-road vehicle use, species loss and Human/wildlife encounters

The Durango Mountain Resort proposes a large, upscale development that will have a serious impact on the social, economic, and environmental aspects of Durango and the Four Corners region. If built, this development will have a permanent long lasting impact on the environment and surrounding areas.

The Alliance will be following the development closely in the coming months. Our intern, Jonathan Blair, is monitoring the development for the Alliance. He can be reached at [jtblair@GRUMPY.FORTLEWIS.EDU](mailto:jtblair@GRUMPY.FORTLEWIS.EDU) or by calling the Alliance office. ■

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***Organizing  
for the  
people  
and land  
of the  
San Juan  
Basin***