



OIL SHALE RESURFACES

Western Colorado may be a pawn in the oil endgame

By Dave Reed

Another year, another new threat. Or rather, another *old* threat, revived: oil shale.

In mid-December, the Bureau of Land Management, under orders from Congress, officially launched an 18-month process to analyze the impacts of commercial oil shale development in Colorado, Wyoming and Utah.

The first step is to define the scope of the process. The BLM is holding a series of public meetings around the region this month, and will be accepting written comments from citizens through Jan. 31 (see box on next page).

Why should we care?

Here's the short, candid answer. Oil-shale development on a commercial scale may never happen – but if it does, it will cause almost unimaginable disruption to our entire region's environment, economy and social fabric.

Either way, the process now set in motion by the BLM will decide whether, and how, development will be allowed to occur. This is our first chance to weigh in on it.

The Wilderness Workshop is teaming up with other conservation groups to

file technical comments. We urge you to express your concerns, too, because regardless of what the feds say to the contrary, the sheer volume of response and depth of feeling do influence decision-makers.

Awful to unthinkable

The BLM is tasked with producing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) on oil shale development in the Green River Formation of Colorado, Wyoming and Utah, which will consider the impacts of a number of development scenarios and pick a preferred alternative. (The PEIS will also assess the development of tar sands in other parts of the country.)

The potential impacts range from awful to unthinkable, depending on which specific parcels the BLM decides to open up to development, the pace of development it envisions and the technologies it permits.

Oil shale deposits underlay about 7 million acres in the three states. One

of the biggest deposits stretches roughly from Rangely to Paonia, and touches part of the Thompson Creek roadless area west of Carbondale.

The “traditional” method of extraction (in quotes because it's never proved commercially viable) is to strip-mine the oil shale and cook it in a giant



A test well at Shell's Mahogany Research Facility near Rangely.

kin, called a retort, until it releases its hydrocarbons. The surface impacts from such a process would be catastrophic: a report issued last year by the Department of Energy envisions open-pit mines 2,000 feet deep, with nearly all the region's surplus water being dedicated to oil shale!

Shell Oil is currently experimenting with a different method at its

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Mahogany Research Facility near Rangely. In this “in situ” process, the oil shale is baked in the ground by an array of electric heating elements drilled 1,000 feet into the rock, which bring the temperature of the shale up to 700 degrees Fahrenheit over a period of two to three years. In addition, a ring of *cooling* elements has to be inserted to create a “freeze wall” around the entire retort area to prevent groundwater contamination.

The in-situ process would pockmark the surface with wells spaced every 200 feet or so – essentially 100% surface disturbance.

Needless to say, either method would spell disaster for wildlife and wildlife habitat, wetlands and ripari-

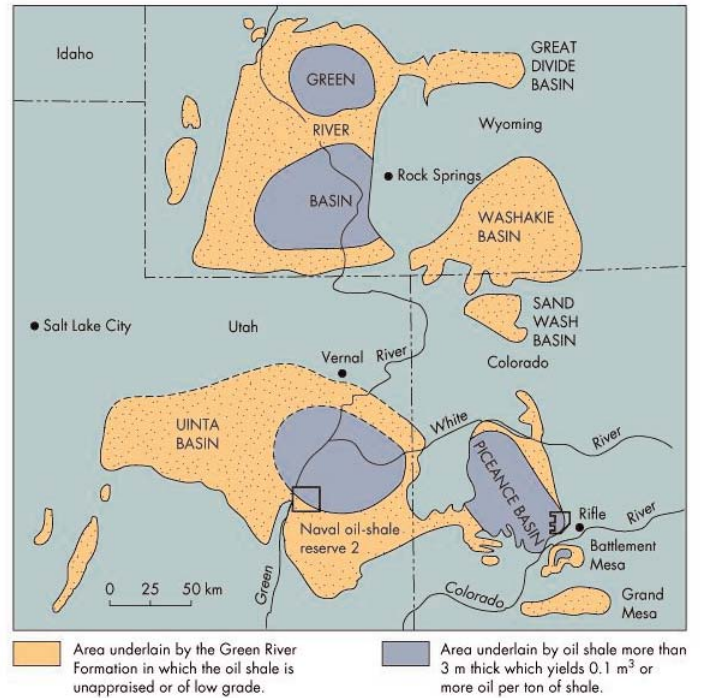
an areas, water and air quality, recreation, hunting and fishing, solitude, scenery and all the other values and uses these lands are currently managed for.

National sacrifice zone

But wait, there’s more.

The best-case estimate is that it will take the equivalent of a third of a barrel of oil to extract and retort each barrel of synfuel from shale. (Some experts think the ratio of energy output to input will actually be no better than two to one.)

Where will all that energy come from? In the case of Shell’s in-situ process, it would have to be in the form of electricity. The Rand Corporation calculates that to meet the target of 1 million barrels a day envisioned in the Energy



Department report it would require the construction of ten new power plants, each the size of the Hayden Plant in Craig. They in turn would burn through 50 million tons of coal a year and generate 100 million tons of CO₂, the main culprit in

climate change.

Welcome to the energy endgame, where each new barrel of oil is not only more expensive to find but also more environmentally damaging to produce. And where a three-state area risks being turned into a national sacrifice zone simply to stoke a fossil-fueled economy for a few more years.

Beyond the environmental impacts, there are social ones as well.

Tens of thousands of workers would be needed to sustain such an industry. Entire new cities would have to be built – not only houses but also stores, schools, police and fire stations and so on. Roads would have to be widened to accommodate the increased traffic. And of course all these extra people, vehicles and buildings

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OIL SHALE: TELL 'EM WHAT YOU THINK

The BLM will hold a public scoping meeting on its Oil Shale and Tar Sands Leasing Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) on Wednesday, Jan. 18, at the Garfield County Fairgrounds Meeting Room, 1001 Railroad Avenue, Rifle, from 1-4 p.m. and again from 7-10 p.m.

Other meetings are being held in Salt Lake City, Price, Vernal, Rock Springs, Cheyenne and Denver.

If you can't make the Rifle meeting, please take the time to fire your comments to the BLM via email or regular mail. Comments must be sent or post-marked no later than Jan. 31.

You can email comments through the BLM's website, www.ostseis.anl.gov.

Mail comments to: BLM Oil Shale and Tar Sands Resources Leasing Programmatic EIS Scoping, Argonne National Laboratory, 9700 S. Cass Ave., Argonne, IL 60439.

The purpose of the public scoping process is to determine relevant issues that will influence the scope of the environmental analysis and the alternatives. Therefore, your comments will be most effective if you urge the BLM to consider specific issues or impacts (direct and indirect) that oil shale development might have.

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would in turn add to the toll on the environment, public health and quality of life.

Moreover, the social-services costs of accommodating this huge influx of mostly transient workers would be in the tens of billions of dol-

consequences of oil shale actually succeeding would be far worse. And there are reasons to believe that this time it could.

For one thing, the energy crises of the 1970s were something of a politically induced false alarm. Today, most authorities agree that

Unfortunately, oil shale is the kind of simple answer that can seduce decision-makers.

lars – never mind the costs of cleaning up the socio-economic mess if the boom were to turn into a bust.

Illusive bonanza

We have been here before. In the late 1970s, spurred by high energy prices, companies pumped billions into developing oil shale in western Colorado. That boom ended with Black Sunday – the day in 1982 when Exxon infamously closed its Colony shale oil project near Parachute, putting thousands out of work.

It took nearly 20 years for local economies to recover. That recovery has been made possible by the recreation, tourism and hunting opportunities found on surrounding public lands – the very values that this commercial oil shale development thrust will kill.

As unpleasant as the failure of Black Sunday was, the

the world is indeed approaching its peak oil production, and the price of oil is likely to only go higher over the long term, making desperate schemes like this seem reasonable.

Furthermore, there's some serious political momentum behind the current push to develop shale oil. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 – the same law that created such a furor last summer for giving billions of dollars in subsidies to the energy industry – provides a powerful mandate to the Energy Department to facilitate and accelerate the commercial development of shale oil. Meanwhile, Washington is taking none of the bold actions to encourage energy efficiency that it did in the 1970s.

It was Ronald Reagan who once said, "There are no easy answers, but there are simple answers."

Unfortunately, oil shale is the kind of simple answer that can seduce decision-makers.

According to the BLM's recently launched oil shale/tar sands website (www.ostseis.anl.gov), a "moderate" estimate of the amount of oil potentially recoverable from shale in the Green River Formation is 800 billion barrels – three

tic) scenario it would supply only about a tenth of the United States' current consumption.

Let's give the last word to Randy Udall, director of the Community Office of Resource Efficiency.

"What contribution can oil shale make to energy security?" he writes in "The Illusive Bonanza: Oil Shale in Colorado" (an excellent article downloadable at www.aspcore.org/images/pdf/OilShale.pdf).

"Producing 100,000 barrels per day of shale oil does not violate the laws of physics; if the price of conventional crude rises high enough it might be economic. But the nation is currently consuming 100,000 barrels of oil every seven minutes.

Increasing the efficiency of America's automobiles by two miles per gallon would save ten times as much fuel each year, saving consumers \$40 billion at the pump."

Which raises an interesting question: will the BLM consider the efficiency of America's automobiles to be outside the scope of its oil-shale decision?

times more than Saudi Arabia's proven oil reserves.

Of course, as noted above, extracting those barrels is horrendously damaging and expensive. But on top of that, any figures on shale-oil reserves are extremely misleading because the oil simply can't be produced fast enough to make much of a difference. Comparisons with Saudi reserves imply that shale oil could meaningfully reduce our dependence on imported oil, when even in the Energy Department's rosiest (i.e., most apocalyp-



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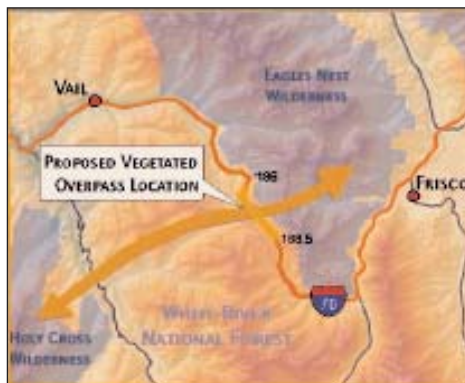
Proclaim your wildness! We've got free "Wild for Good" bumperstickers to give away. Stop by the WW office to pick one up.

ONE GIANT LEAP FOR WILDLIFE

The proposed vegetated wildlife bridge on I-70 west of Vail Pass took a giant leap forward in November when we learned that it will receive a \$500,000 federal high-way appropriation.

Now, while that sounds like a big chunk of money, it's really only a downpayment. The entire project will cost \$4.5-6 million (depending on many engineering and siting factors); this \$500,000 is supposed to cover the cost of a one-year wildlife-movement study, preliminary engineering design and an obligatory environmental analysis of the project. (Yes, even wildlife bridges have to abide by the National Environmental Policy Act.)

None of the money will go to the Wilderness Workshop or the Southern Rockies Ecosystem Project, our partner in advocating for the bridge. It will go straight to the Colorado Depart-



ment of Transportation, which as the official project manager will be responsible for the contracting, construction management and long-term maintenance of the project.

In early January, WW's Sloan Shoemaker and SREP's Monique DiGiorgio convened a series of "what next?" meetings with folks from CDOT, the Federal Highway Administration, the Forest Service and other stakeholders.

It's too soon to know exactly where

the bridge will go within the proposed 2-mile-long corridor – that, of course, is the purpose of the NEPA analysis – but it's safe to say that the main factors to be considered in the analysis will be ease of engineering, economic feasibility, suitability for wildlife, and lack of conflicts with existing transportation and recreation uses.

Our task, meanwhile, will be to keep publicizing the win-win possibilities of this project to the public and potential business partners. Given the project's price tag, and the fact that any federal appropriation may expect a substantial local match, we'll have our fundraising work cut out for us.

If you are able to assist us in soliciting leadership pledges toward this effort, please contact Sloan or Dave at the WW office.

Wildlife bridge slide show – see page 5.

WW BLASTS HELICOPTER PLAN

Our November cover story hinted that there were some, ahem, deficiencies in the Colorado Army National Guard's Environmental Assessment of its plans to expand helicopter training flights in local roadless areas.

Now we can come out and say it: the EA is one of the most brazen attempts by an agency to bypass the process that we've ever seen.

WW Executive Director Sloan Shoemaker took the gloves off in a devastating critique he submitted in late December.

WW's comments, which were joined by nine other Colorado conservation groups, calls the EA a "flawed document with prejudiced disclosures driving a pre-determined conclusion" and lashes the Guard for its calculating

attempt to use the EA to grandfather helicopter landings on Forest Service land that were never allowed.

"As a comparison," Sloan writes, "if an entrepreneur walked into a Forest Service office today with a proposal to conduct a helicopter scenic overflight business with 3,000 flights per year that included 7,200 landings on 440,000 acres of national forest lands, approvals for that proposal would be considered a major federal action with significant environmental effects thus requiring an environmental impact statement (EIS). So, too, should the incremental and unauthorized expansion of [the Guard's helicopter training program] be subjected to a rigorous analysis of its environmental effects and not merely asserted as a baseline condition."

While NEPA comments (i.e., those filed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act) ordinarily make for dry reading, Sloan's 25-page tome is actually fairly entertaining in its relentless skewering of the Guard's biased and unfounded assertions.

We don't file such critiques for mere sport, of course. The fact is that the Guard, being both the project proponent and the agency analyzing its impacts, may find its EA sufficient. It's our hope that they will honor the process and significantly improve the quality of impacts analysis and disclosure. But if not, we are most certainly prepared to hold their feet to the fire, and these comments lay the groundwork for that.

After all, securing democracy starts at home.

CAMPAIGNS-R-US

The Wilderness Workshop is back in campaign mode!

We're still covering all the bureaucratic bases that one has to cover, but, thanks to a combination of circumstance and strategy (see article, page 6), we have no fewer than three major campaigns planned for 2006.

Colorado Roadless Campaign

As reported in the last newsletter, WW and the Colorado Mountain Club are partnering to lead the White River National Forest portion of this campaign.

Under the Bush administration's revised Roadless Area Conservation Rule, states are now required to petition Washington to give their roadless areas protected status. Here in Colorado, a Roadless Task Force is conducting public meetings around the state to take public input on how much roadless acreage to protect.

Some 50 citizens attended our campaign kickoff meeting in Carbondale on Dec. 1. It was an energetic and productive meeting, and out of it emerged four separate working groups tasked with strategizing how best to frame the educational, recreational, ecological and economic arguments for roadless protections. (If you would like to join one of these groups, please contact the WW office to find out

how to get plugged in.)

The goal of this campaign is to generate a huge turnout and powerful, substantive citizen input at a June 21 Task Force meeting in Glenwood Springs.

White River Wilderness Campaign

This campaign to secure up to 26 additional wilderness areas in the greater WRNF region, which has been on a slow burn for the past year, will kick into high gear this spring with the hiring of our new community organizer (see page 7).

Many of these areas adjoin existing wilderness and would be added to them – for example, parcels along Highways 82 and 133 would be added to the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness, while the Woods Lake parcel would be added to the Holy Cross Wilderness. Others – such as Red Table/Basalt Mountain and the Thompson Creek roadless complex – would become new stand-alone wilderness areas.

We're aiming to build grassroots support for this proposal through community meetings, media coverage, letter-writing, outreach to non-traditional allies (hunters, anglers, outfitters, ranchers, local businesses, etc.) and presentations to local elected bodies and community groups. Our

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upcoming events

WINTER SPEAKER SERIES

Rob Edward: "Wolves in the New West"

Rob is the director of Sinapu's Carnivore Restoration Program.

- ♦ *Tuesday, Jan. 17* – Aspen Center for Environmental Studies (ACES), 100 Puppysmith Rd., 7 p.m.
- ♦ *Wednesday, Jan. 18* – Dos Gringos, Hwy 133 (La Fontana Plaza), Carbondale, 7 p.m.

Harvey Locke: "Spine of the Continent: Large Landscape Conservation in the Rockies"

Two winters ago, Harvey delivered an inspiring slide show on the Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative. This time, he'll focus on the "Colorado island."

- ♦ *Monday, Jan. 30* – Dos Gringos, Carbondale, 7 p.m.
- ♦ *Tuesday, Jan. 31* – ACES, 7 p.m.

Sloan Shoemaker: "Safe Journey: Bridging the Berlin Wall for Colorado's Wildlife"

Sloan will take us on a virtual tour of the proposed West Vail Pass wildlife bridge (see page 4).

- ♦ *Tuesday, Jan. 31* – Berry Creek Elementary School, Edwards, 5:30 p.m.
- ♦ *Tuesday, Feb. 21* – ACES, 7 p.m.

CALLING ALL REALTORS

Please come to the Aspen Board of Realtors luncheon meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 18, and encourage your colleagues to attend, too. WW's Sloan Shoemaker will give a slide show on local conservation issues; we are hoping the Realtors will form a committee to fundraise on behalf of the Workshop. Sky Hotel, Aspen. 11:45 a.m.

ASPEN HALL OF FAME

Prepare to come honor our leading ladies, Connie Harvey and Dottie Fox, who will be inducted into Aspen Hall of Fame! (Joy Caudill, our third cofounder, was inducted in 1998.) Thursday, Jan. 26 at the Hotel Jerome. Cocktails at 6 p.m., banquet and video tributes at 7. \$125/person. 925-2172.



CAMPAIGNS

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goal is to bring this show of public support to our members of Congress shortly after the dust settles from the November elections.

WRNF Travel Management Plan

After years of delays, the White River National Forest now swears it will release its Draft Travel Management Plan (TMP) in late spring or early summer.

The TMP determines the disposition of all roads and trails on the Forest – which means that, among other things, it dictates if and where new roads will be developed, which old roads will be retired, and where motorized use will and will not be allowed. Our objective is to shape the TMP to ensure maximum protection for roadless areas, watersheds, wildlife and critical habitat.

The release of the DEIS will trigger a very busy 90-day public comment period, during which we and our partner organizations will get on the ground to analyze the impacts of the draft travel proposals; educate citizens on the importance of a conservation-based plan; and ensure that the media provide a balanced look at the alternatives.

Please let us know if you would like to get involved in any of these campaigns.

FOUNDERS' FELLOW ON DECK

Last June we announced the creation of the Founders' Fellowship, a rotating one-year, full-time position named in honor of Connie Harvey, Dottie Fox and Joy Caudill.

The cost of the first year's fellowship is to be funded out of the proceeds of the gala tribute to the three ladies and premiere of the film about them, *Wild for Good*, which was held in late 2004.

It took a while, but we've finally snagged our first Founders' Fellow – and he was definitely worth the wait. Alex Sienkiewicz will start work in early February, specializing in policy and NEPA filings.

Alex has just completed his PhD in ecosystem-based management at the



Alex with Severn.

University of Montana's College of Forestry and Conservation, where he studied under former USFS Chief Jack Ward Thomas, who ran the agency during the spotted owl controversies of the 1990s. He also has a law degree from UM and an MPA from the University of Washington, has served

as editor-in-chief of the *Public Land and Resources Law Review*, and has taught with the Teach for America program in South-Central Los Angeles.

He's married to Holly, a nurse practitioner, and together they have two kids, Severn (2) and Colter (8 months). As we go to press, the family is busy relocating from Missoula to their new digs in Redstone.

WW IN 2010: BIGGER, BOLDER

You might have seen the column that WW board member Paul Andersen wrote in the *Aspen Times*, titled "On Sloan's List." Paul focused on Executive Director Sloan Shoemaker's opening remarks to the WW Board's annual retreat in October, in which he laid out the alarming number of ecological threats facing western Colorado.

That sobering intro led to a very perceptive and focused discussion of WW's priorities and the resources needed to tackle them, and from it emerged a clear vision for the Wilderness

Workshop over the next five-plus years.

The consensus was that, if ever there was a time be bold and take risks in the defense of our wild places, this is it.

The Board had previously approved the hiring of a third staffer, the Founders' Fellow; at the retreat, it set a goal of increasing the staff to five or six by 2010, and to "front-load" the additional staff increases as much as possible. The new positions will increase WW's capacity in the areas of community organizing, biology, communications, outreach/educa-

tion and office administration.

Another important retreat conclusion was that, whenever appropriate, WW should organize its work into campaigns. In the current political climate, the tools conservation groups have traditionally relied on are being systematically weakened. Fortunately, public discontent provides a powerful alternative tool. While WW will continue to work within the system, it will put much more energy into mobilizing the public to push back on harmful (and unpopular) proposals.

MAKI CHALLENGE GRANT FUNDS NEW STAFF

Huge, wonderful, exciting news: WW has just received two challenge grants totaling \$50,000 from the Maki Foundation, in memory of Ruth Salzman Adams.

Maki, which is a foundation of WW cofounder Connie Harvey and her family, has long made annual grants for the Workshop's general operations, but this is a much more significant commitment, for which we're extremely grateful.

Ruth Adams was a dear friend of Connie's, as well as a Maki Foundation board member. During her long

career she worked for or served on the boards of dozens of organizations all over the world, focusing particularly on peace and nuclear nonproliferation. She and her husband Bob were part-time residents of the Fryingpan Valley.

The larger of the Maki grants, for \$40,000, is to fund most of the first year's cost of a new community organizer position (additional funding will come from the Southern Rockies Conservation Alliance). The other \$10,000 is to be added to WW's endowment, now known as the Founders'

Fund.

We've already started advertising for the community organizer, and we hope to have someone filling that seat by March. And a very hot seat it will be, with three major campaigns queued up and needing to be managed.

Per our five-year plan (see page 6), we intend to make the organizer position permanent.

And that's where the challenge comes in: the Maki Foundation expects WW to raise another \$40,000 from other sources by yearend to ensure continued funding

for the organizer position through 2007.

And speaking of challenge grants, WW board member Mike Stranahan has made a personal challenge grant of \$5,000 for WW's general operations – again, this amount must be matched by yearend.

Please consider making a gift or pledge to help leverage these generous grants – and to enable WW to do more and better work in defense of our wild places. For more information, please contact Dave Reed at 963-3977, dave@wilder-nessworkshop.org.

DONOR HALL OF FAME

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P.O. Box 1442
Carbondale, CO 81623
Main office located at
75B N. 2nd St., Carbondale
Tel (970) 963-3977
Fax (970) 963-8447
www.wildernessworkshop.org
info@wildernessworkshop.org

The Wilderness Workshop's mission is to protect and conserve the wilderness and natural resources of the Roaring Fork Watershed, the White River National Forest, and adjacent lands.

WW is a nonprofit organization that engages in research, education, legal advocacy, and grassroots organizing to protect the ecological integrity of local landscapes and public lands with a focus on the monitoring and conservation of air and water quality, wildlife species and habitat, natural communities, and lands of wilderness quality.

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“We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope.”

- Wallace Stegner