

ECOFLIGHT NEWS

education and advocacy for the environment

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Night view of the light pollution created by energy development – natural gas on the Roan Plateau with Rifle in the background. © Dan Bayer/EcoFlight 2008

Oil Shale – the feds’ next non-renewable resource

The oil shale boom went bust in the late 1920’s and again in the 1980’s, as did the towns of Parachute and Rifle, Colorado. Oil shale is a common natural resource found on all of the inhabited continents. But just like natural gas, oil shale is a non-renewable resource, indicating that if the feds see fit to invest in oil shale again, a bust, however far in the future, is inevitable. The economy of western Colorado (and eastern Utah and southwestern Wyoming) is not all that is at stake here. Our valuable water, our wildlife habitat, our pristine landscapes and our children’s education are all at risk.

Ground Zero for oil shale development is right here in the Piceance Basin of Colorado. EcoFlight flies this area every few weeks and cannot believe that this land can sustain any more development. The small towns of Rifle, Parachute and Meeker cannot handle the current boom of natural gas. How will these communities and the land fare if the Department of the Interior follows through with its promise of commercial development on more than 2 million acres of what is left of these public lands? The DOI rushed to issue final rules on oil shale before the end of the calendar year - the grand finale to this administration’s backward thinking energy policies.

The fight over oil shale has become a major issue in Colorado's U.S. Senate race as well as a regular talking point for Republicans nationwide. At the White House in June, President Bush blasted Democrats for “standing in the way” of oil-shale development and hurting ordinary Americans. Thankfully, Obama does not support a rush to develop oil shale; “when it comes to oil shale right now, I think we have to do more research and more science to discover whether or not the amount of oil that would be generated would justify what would inevitably be some disruption of the landscape here in Colorado”.

Commercial oil shale development relies on unproven, environmentally destructive, and economically dubious technologies that are decades away from commercial readiness. It is inappropriate to rush into developing oil shale when even the oil and gas industry does not know if the technology works. And the biggest impact may be on **water**. It is estimated that it would take three barrels of water to produce one barrel of shale oil. But the impacts are much

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Letter from the President

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Obamarama. What has changed, what will change?

For me personally I am once again as proud of the US of A as I was when I got out of the service way back when, marched on Washington and we eventually got out of Vietnam.

Our country will still be facing immense challenges. The damage already done to our country is in many ways reflected in our policies regarding energy. While the presidential election was an immense relief; on the local level in Garfield County (Roan Plateau country) and New Mexico near the town of Aztec, politics as usual prevailed and the oil and gas industry spent millions helping to elect pro-energy development candidates.

Even as the last days of the Bush administration wind down we are seeing unprecedented challenges to our wild places. Uranium mining near the Grand Canyon in Arizona, a rush by the BLM to expand its oil and gas lease program in eastern Utah to include tens of thousands of acres on or near the boundaries of three national parks, and continued commitment to bringing oil shale back to the USA.

Our flying summer was busy and bold. Neither pine bark beetles, outrageous fuel prices nor the BLM could stop our aerial perspective from illuminating difficult issues and educating for sustainable solutions. Our work with the press continues to grow and being involved with the Democratic National Convention and the Western Governors Association were some of the highlights of our summer. At the DNC in Denver we flew press and staff over the spectacular beauty of Rocky Mountain National Park, currently proposed as Wilderness; while at the WGA we were able to show the important wildlife migratory corridors advocated by Freedom to Roam, who are sponsored by Patagonia.

As the New Year approaches we are more excited about going on the offensive and helping to create new wild areas and good legislation instead of doing our darndest to hold the line in the face of bad policies.

Many times I see our mission as 'Giving the Land a Voice'. Hopefully our country is finally ready to listen.

Best,

Bruce Gordon
President, EcoFlight

The Cavalry to the Rescue

Oil boom in Walden the headlines read. Many locals are ecstatic in this remote beautiful enclave in the wildlife rich North Park of Colorado. More money, more people, more business. Back to the good old days of this resource-based community. Could this be another Pinedale Wyoming? Groups representing sportsmen and conservationists are cautious.

If you've ever flown over the Jonah field or the Pinedale Anticline outside of Pinedale, Wyoming you would be cautious too. Poor planning and laissez faire rules and regulations have been out of control and out of balance for many years. So yes, the Walden development could be a boon, if and only if it is done properly.

Sportsmen and ranchers along with conservationists have formed an unlikely alliance. Environmental groups are teaming up with the sporting community which has rallied and is becoming one of the most effective advocates for sustainable resource policies. This summer EcoFlight has been working with Sportsmen from the National Wildlife Federation, Trout Unlimited and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservationist Partnership. Sportsmen For Responsible Energy Development is in sync with EcoFlight's philosophy that energy development can and must be done properly. They cherish their pristine sporting grounds.

Our flights this summer ranged from Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico to the wild areas south and north of Rock Springs, Wyoming, flying mule deer, elk, and antelope and moose habitat.

The coalition of Sportsmen is giving a big lift to the conservation community's efforts in the West. They are like the cavalry that has come to help in the nick of time.



Pristine wildlife area near Walden, Colorado © Bruce Gordon/EcoFlight 2008.

Mudsicle Alert

EcoFlight recon trip leads to discovery of fifth oil and gas 'incident'.

In March 2008, EcoFlight flew a survey of several recent oil and gas spills in the Garden Gulch area on the Roan Plateau in Garfield County Colorado (on private land just to the west of the BLM's Roan Plateau Planning Area). While trying to locate the already disclosed spills, the reconnaissance trip made a discovery of its own: a fifth unreported 'incident.'

The EcoFlight trip included representatives from several local and national conservation groups who were able to photograph this large frozen pile of brown mud, perched above Parachute Creek. Photos ran in the Denver Post and other newspapers around the state and region. As the Denver Post reported: Garden Gulch, a remote ravine north of the town of Parachute, has been the site of four spills and leaks from oil and gas drilling in the past five months.

New information pegs it as also being the site of a huge soil-erosion deposit that fell during the building of an oil-field pipeline above. As was the case in two of the spills, the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission wasn't notified, as required by law, about the erosion problem. (Denver Post, March 26, 2008: "Soil tower, spills loom over water.")

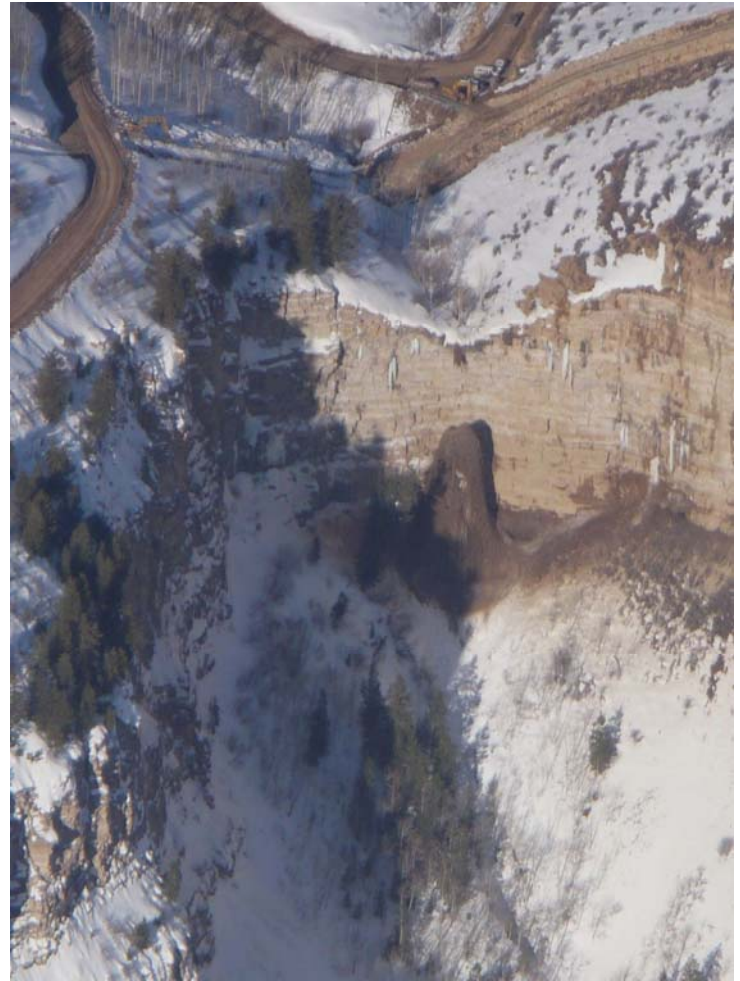
The discovery of the 'soil tower,' the result of a major storm water or other sediment discharge from a pipeline construction project in which the company failed to install proper mitigations and failed to report this mishap to the state, led to an injunction being filed by the Colorado Attorney General to halt the pipeline project until proper remediation was made.

Whether it's the carcinogens showing up in water wells and springs or massive sediment flows choking streams and fisheries, the widespread industrialization of our landscapes raises a significant threat to the West's most precious resource, our clean water and healthy river systems.

The regularity of these incidents - toxic releases, fires, spills, accidents, and poisonings - and the fact that most seem to be 'discovered' by a third party rather than reported by the perpetrator, suggests that such mishaps are not uncommon in the growing gas fields of the Rocky Mountain West.

Thanks to EcoFlight, at least this incident will not go unreported.

Pete Kolbenschlag, Mountain West Strategies, Colorado.



Frozen waterfall of sediment discharge in the Garden Gulch area near Parachute. © Bruce Gordon/EcoFlight 2008.

Bonjour Mes Amis

Oui EcoFlight est en les nouvelles:

“...Bruce Gordon est un petit homme sec, le profil parfait de l'alpiniste...c'est simple, dit-il. Mon Cessna fait du 300km/h. Je ne peux plus vole rune demi-heure entre le Wyoming et le Nouveau-Mexique sans voir des puit. ”

Yes, EcoFlight has been in the news: in France's top newspaper, Le Monde, and on Radio France International and European television stations. These journalists were in the US for the elections and were excited by EcoFlight's ability to illuminate the latest stories coming out of the Roan Plateau, and the cost of this energy development to the local communities. EcoFlight has flown many reporters and journalists this summer and it has become quite a story in Europe.

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greater. Water is the life-blood of the West and a relatively scarce resource of the semi-arid Western Slope, essential to ranching and farming and life sustainability. This crucial resource is dwindling due to many different reasons – one of them being the very real issue of climate change and one of them being greed.

Even the Bureau of Land Management acknowledges there could be trouble down the road. They just released a report that says oil shale development will require vast amounts of water, use a lot of energy to get out of the ground, and will create toxic waste and air pollution. They even admit rural communities on the West Slope will be changed overnight from agricultural-based communities to industrial-based ones

if oil shale takes off. Look at the lead photo for this article showing the night view of Las Vegas. Or is it the Piceance Basin? Our pilot doesn't need to fly IFR (instruments) to guide us through this night sky. We have all the light pollution we need for easy night flying. What would this picture look like with oil shale added to the equation? How would the Rifle rancher's night view look then?

For us in Colorado, especially in Garfield County, the oil shale idea might be one of those really bad ideas that pop up now and again, only time will tell. The energy boom might continue to boom for a long time but it could bust just as easily and if the feds can go slow with the planning of oil shale, maybe the bust won't be as reckless as it was in the 1980's.

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