

ECOFLIGHT NEWS

education and advocacy for the environment

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Aerial view of wind farm turbines outside Palm Springs, CA. © Jane Pargiter/EcoFlight 2007

The Answer is Blowing in the Wind

Colorado is the 11th windiest and 6th sunniest state in the nation and Colorado Governor Ritter is standing behind his pledge to make Colorado the renewable-energy center of the US, as he helped open a 400-megawatt wind farm in northeastern Colorado, (2nd largest in the US) this May.

Wind energy as a renewable resource has terrific benefits to consumers and the country – developing wind farms creates jobs, diversifies local economies, is a secure (on US soil) abundant and inexhaustible supply of energy. Once the wind farm is constructed, there are no future costs; the fuel is free forever. Wind power reduces air pollution by reducing dependence on non-renewable fuels and produces *zero* emissions of greenhouse gases, therefore lessening the impacts of global warming.

EcoFlight flew senate staff, television stations and multiple newspaper reporters over the new and existing wind farm sites. Our flight path took us over the Xcel energy “Pawnee” coal-fired Power Plant on the Nebraska border, offering a stark contrast between this new energy source and an outdated technology that allows for recurrent pollution. One participant

was Michael Bowman, a National Steering Committee member of the 25x25 Alliance, a coalition initially formed by farm leaders and now a non-partisan alliance of industry, labor, conservation and religious groups. 25x 25’s rallying cry

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Coal fired power plant in the Four Corners region. © Bruce Gordon/EcoFlight 2007



Letter from the President

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Spring; a new beginning, and from our perspective, a very good one. Due to “global weirding” and another early spring, we have been flying as if it were mid-summer with our work once again focused on wilderness and the impacts of oil, gas and other resource extraction. With recent victories on the Rocky Mountain Front and the Valle Vidal and a new congress in place, there is every reason for optimism. I remember flying over the Rocky Mountain Front in 1982 with Gloria Flora when the threat of opening up the Front to energy development seemed like it would never go away. Now, thanks to the dedication of activists and organizations like the Wyss and Hewlett Foundations, the Wilderness Society, the Nature Conservancy and countless others, it has finally gone away.

As a community, we conservationists have maintained that oil and gas drilling can and must be done properly. We have also held the firm belief that some places are simply too important ecologically and should be left untouched. These include, among others, the Rocky Mountain Front, the Valle Vidal, the Otero Mesa and the Roan Plateau. The Valle Vidal Protection Act became law this past December and there are hopes that the Otero and Roan will follow suit. As the BLM prepares to release it’s first-ever management plan for Roan Plateau, which would open the entire area to oil and gas leasing, citizens and area communities have taken a different tact: going directly to Congress. On May 15, Colorado Congressmen John Salazar and Mark Udall asked for a funding limitation that would grant the Roan Plateau a “time out”, prohibiting leasing of these lands through September 2008. Local governments, thousands of citizens, and an alliance of environmental, recreation, and wildlife groups remain committed to ensuring that the Roan Plateau is awarded the permanent protection it deserves.

EcoFlight is proud to have played a role in most of these areas including the Roan, where we recognized early on that the best way to see what was at stake was from the air. EcoFlight provided an aerial perspective to hundreds of elected officials, media representatives, conservationists, activists, students and educators who gained a new context on which to base their future actions. An experience with EcoFlight is often the catalyst that spurs action, creates advocacy, and instills commitment. In the case of the Roan, voices are now being heard and protective action may be imminent.

Best,

Bruce Gordon
President, EcoFlight



Swan Range bordering the Seeley-Swan Valley. © Bruce Gordon/EcoFlight 2007.

Land Stewardship in Montana

They say that in the Rockies, there’s beautiful country and then there’s *really* beautiful country. Up in Montana the Seeley-Swan Valley is a case in point. A vast watershed and series of pristine mountain lakes that feed the Clearwater and Blackwater Rivers (of Robert Redford fame), the Seeley-Swan Valley is surrounded on all sides by towering peaks, an intact ecosystem and abundant wildlife. It is a landscape that epitomizes western American wilderness.

A unique proposal now being put forth by a group of local conservationists, loggers, snowmobilers, outfitters and local landowners would protect this pristine wildland and the local jobs that depend on it. Years in the making, the Blackfoot Stewardship Pilot Program would designate new wilderness additions to the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat and Mission Mountains wilderness areas, expand stewardship funding to restore watersheds, trout and wildlife habitat, maintain recreational access and help develop a co-generation plant that would burn small fuels that need to be removed for forest restoration. The plan also calls for providing about 4 million board feet of timber annually over the next 10 years, providing the local forest products industry with a level of certainty.

To become a reality, the proposal now must gain congressional support. In May, EcoFlight joined forces with the Wilderness Society to fly congressional staffers and reporters over parts of the 400,000 acres included in the proposal. The flights provided critical aerial investigation of the proposal’s potential for the region and exemplified how conservation flight can help illuminate the scope of wilderness issues. On board, local long time outfitter Jack Rich served as guide. “If you want to boil it down to one word, it would be stewardship,” Rich said. “We want this to become a place where people will come to see how stewardship really works.”

What is exciting about this proposal is that local citizens came up with a vision that keeps their livelihoods intact while conserving the ecological resources that make this place so special. As part of the plan, Plum Creek Inc., notorious in these parts for clearcutting vast acreage, will sell some assets to private, state and federal ownership to help conserve water,

enhance watersheds and preserve a wild landscape. The proposal recommends 81,000 acres be added to the Bob Marshall-Sagegoat Wilderness, and 6,000 acres to the Mission Mountain Wilderness, protecting ecological values and the livelihoods of outfitters and other businesses that depend on those values. It includes funding for a new boiler and a 3.2-megawatt Co-Generation facility on about two acres at the Pyramid Mountain Lumber plant. The Biomass Co-Generation facility would be a private-public pilot project that, in addition to providing an outlet for excess forest fuels and meeting the electrical needs of Pyramid Lumber, would add 20 to 30 new well-paying jobs to the area's economy. It's a win-win proposal the likes of which is rarely seen in efforts to secure Wilderness designation. If the Blackfoot Stewardship Pilot Program succeeds in garnering congressional backing, it could well prove to be a model for other western communities as they work to balance wilderness and local economics.



A portion of the Otero Mesa. © Bruce Gordon/EcoFlight 2007

Flying for a Moratorium on Drilling in the Otero Mesa

Oscar Simpson, a booming voice for the hunters and anglers of New Mexico, brought together The National Wildlife Federation with the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance in April to rally local support in Alamogordo and Las Cruces, NM for a moratorium on leasing and drilling in the Otero Mesa. In spite of the typical high winds that scour this area and have helped create the wild landscapes of southern New Mexico, EcoFlight took to the air with diverse passenger loads of sportsmen, elected officials and conservationists, giving them a unique perspective of this vast rare desert grassland.

Encompassing 1.2 million acres, the Otero Mesa is considered North America's largest and wildest grasslands remaining on public lands. Approximately 250,000 acres of this Chihuahuan Desert grassland have so far been targeted by industry for oil and gas development. 51,600 acres have already been leased, with more lease sales being planned.

Otero Mesa is home to the state's healthiest herd of pronghorn antelope and a wide variety of other animals and plants, but is especially important as habitat for grassland and migratory birds. Oil and gas drilling in this fragile landscape would fragment the ecosystem, making it vulnerable to desert scrub introduction, significantly changing the plant community and destroying habitat critical to grassland species.

The Otero Mesa has one of the largest underlying aquifers in the United States, the Salt Basin, with arguably enough fresh water to easily supply over 1 million people for over 100 years; this aquifer is naturally recharged by four streams flowing into this area. Not only should the Otero Mesa be protected for its unique grasslands, the birdlife and wildlife it sustains but very importantly for the human population of New Mexico as a current and future sustainable fresh water supply. Protection of the Otero Mesa already has the strong support of Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Governor Bill Richardson. Richardson has pledged his support for protecting this spectacular landscape, filing suit against the federal government on Earth Day, 2005. This is the first time in New Mexico history that the state has sued the federal government over a public lands issue.



High school student Dailey Haren speaks to reporters after her Flight Across America flight. © Bruce Gordon/EcoFlight 2006.

Kestrel Program expands into Utah

EcoFlight extended its educational arm into the Grand County High School auditorium in April 2007. EcoFlight's *Flight Across America* works to empower students and young adults to have a voice for their environment and Dailey Haren is a true graduate of this educational opportunity we afforded her in 2006 - she has become a leader and an advocate for what inspires her, in this instance her home - the heart of America's red rock country, Southern Utah. She spearheaded Ceasefire, a group of students and teachers at her school, which worked together with SUWA and EcoFlight to produce an all-school seminar focused on public land use in southern Utah and the threat of oil and gas. A lively debate by Grand County's award winning debate team created the perfect tool with which to educate these 200 high school students about the constant threat these lands are exposed to by both industrial and recreational pursuits: the Red Rock Wilderness Act would preserve this land for all future generations of Americans. Students were especially vocal in their support for preserving this land after experiencing the aerial view of these desert wild lands.

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is for America to be using 25% renewable energy by the year 2025. As Bowman says, "we live in a pivotal time for future energy development... it's critical that we all work together and set forth on a responsible path, one that both ensures clean air and water and a stable climate, as well as contributing to the economic vitality of our rural communities".

Wind power uses the force of the wind to drive a turbine that produces electricity. Wind power is renewable because it is created by the energy from the sun that drives the earth's weather patterns. Turbines are typically clustered in "wind farms" scattered throughout reliably windy areas and often share space with agricultural farmlands. These large

installations supply electricity to regional and national power grids for sale to homes and businesses. Small individual turbines can provide electricity to rural residences or grid-isolated locations.

*A pilot's business is with the wind,
and with the stars, with night,
with sand, with the sea.*

— *Antoine de Saint Exupéry, 'Wind, Sand, and Stars,' 1939*

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Edited and Produced for EcoFlight by Les Welsh. Contributors include Bruce Gordon and Jane Pargiter. ©EcoFlight 2007.

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