

State, Tipton, energy industry want closer look at BLM plan

By [Dennis Webb](#)

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U.S. Rep. Scott Tipton, state agencies and an oil and gas group are asking that more time be provided for analysis of a draft Bureau of Land Management plan that the industry says could have a major bearing on western Colorado's economy in future decades.

The Colorado Department of Natural Resources and Colorado Parks and Wildlife are seeking an extension of the Dec. 15 deadline for comment on the proposal for the BLM's Colorado River Valley Field Office, based in Silt. Likewise, the West Slope Colorado Oil & Gas Association wants more time for commenting.

The proposal covers activities on more than 500,000 acres of federal land in five counties. BLM spokesman Steven Hall said his agency will decide on the extension requests "at the appropriate time."

West Slope COGA Executive Director David Ludlam wrote in his request that the extra comment time is warranted for a management plan that "will have significant bearing on a huge footprint of land and natural resources in Western Colorado — and by extension, the direction of the region's economy — for the next 15–20 years."

He specifically cited the potential implications for the economic health of Garfield and Mesa counties.

Tipton, a Republican representing the 3rd Congressional District, wrote to the BLM that more time is needed for Coloradans to comment on a "highly impactful plan" affecting economically challenged communities that "rely on sound resource planning for economic stability and growth."

Ludlam wrote that one particular concern for the industry is the BLM failed to fully account for the "significant technological breakthroughs" in just the last year or so that hold promise for developing previously untapped shale formations. As a result the agency appears to have "understated, under analyzed and unduly restricted" development of these formations, he wrote.

"While the industry itself is in the early stages of understanding the geology and economic promises of these shale plays in the planning area, there is considerable evidence — within the region, in other parts of Colorado and around the nation — that these shale plays hold tremendous opportunities for a nation hungry for more jobs and more domestic energy," Ludlam wrote.

Peter Hart, staff attorney for the Wilderness Workshop conservation group in Carbondale, said environmentalists long have contended the BLM has underestimated projections for oil and gas development, and thus failed to fully analyze the possible impacts, including when it leased more than 50,000 acres on the Roan Plateau in 2008.

"Ludlam's letter just points out that they're going to do it again," he said.

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