

BLM's New Land Use Plans Will Eviscerate Utah's Roadless Areas

The Utah Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is drafting its land use plans (officially known as Resource Management Plans, or "RMPs") and travel plans for approximately 11 million acres of public lands on Utah's Colorado Plateau. As part of the process, BLM has identified and confirmed that 2.8 million acres of these spectacular lands have wilderness characteristics. These "BLM Roadless Areas" include high desert plateaus and mesas, deep sandstone canyons, rare desert streams and springs, relict plant communities, critical wildlife habitat, and some of the most densely located and significant prehistoric cultural artifacts in the United States. These resources are our nation's natural and cultural heritage.

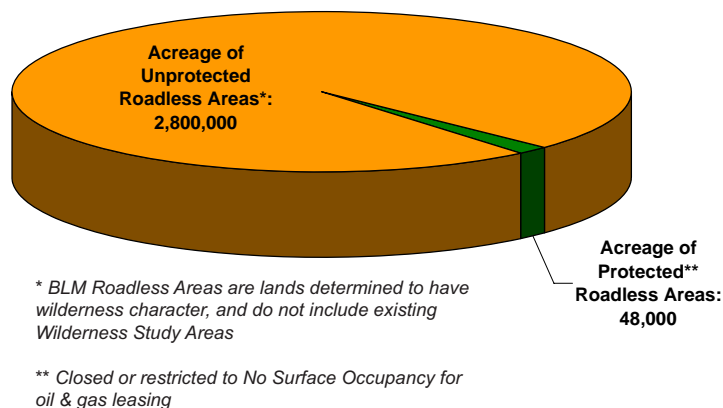
Although BLM acknowledges that these BLM Roadless Areas have wilderness values – characteristics that, once destroyed, are lost forever – the agency is choosing to manage these lands to favor corporate energy development and motorized recreation in plans that will govern the use of these lands for the next 15-20 years. Before BLM finalizes these plans in the coming months, an important yet easy fix should be implemented.

Utah BLM's Plans: Multiple Problems with an Easy Fix

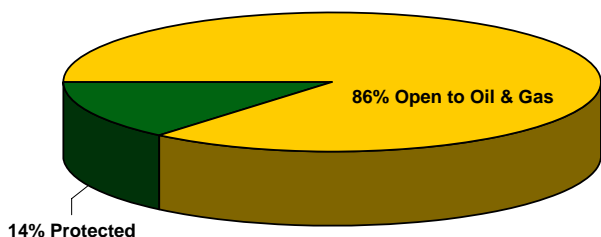
Problem #1. BLM plans to manage less than 2% (48,000 acres) of these BLM Roadless Areas to preserve their wilderness values.

Problem #2. BLM plans to make 84% of these 11 million acres of public lands available for off-road vehicle use. In particular, BLM plans to designate approximately 18,000 miles of motorized vehicle route in the new travel plans – including roughly 1,000 miles of route in the BLM Roadless Areas.

BLM's Proposal for Protecting Roadless Areas in Utah



Acres Open to Oil and Gas Development vs. Acres Protected in BLM's Proposal



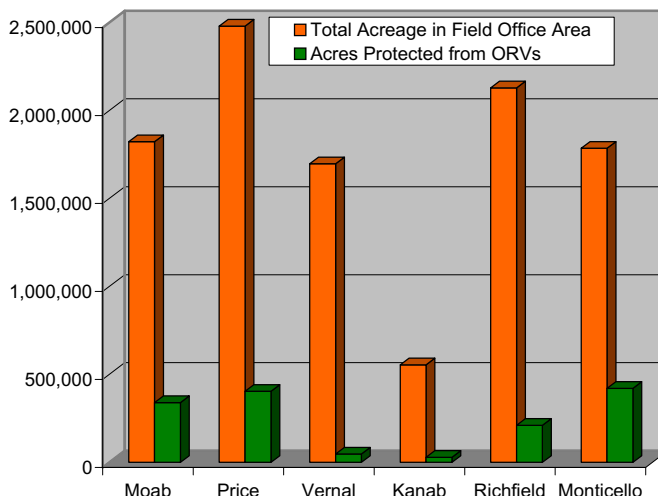
Problem #3. Government data indicate that less than 4 weeks of natural gas and roughly 4 days of oil at current consumption levels would be "technically recoverable" from these Roadless Areas, yet BLM plans to allow oil and gas development on approximately 86% of the BLM Roadless Areas.

Problem #4. Riparian areas are extremely scarce resources in Utah's high desert landscapes. Indeed, these areas make up only 1-2% of Utah's public lands yet they support 75-80% of all wildlife. Utah BLM plans to designate ORV routes in most (if not all) of the riparian areas in the 11 million acres under review, including riparian areas in BLM Roadless Areas.

Problem #5. Utah's Colorado Plateau contains some of the most renowned cultural resources in the world, including prehistoric rock art, cliff dwellings, and artifacts. Some of these resources have been documented, the vast majority have not. BLM estimates that less than 6% of its lands – including remote, largely undisturbed Roadless Areas – have been inventoried for cultural resources. BLM plans to designate off-road vehicle routes in areas known to have cultural resources, even though scientific studies conclude that motorized routes within sight of cultural resources greatly increase the risk of vandalism, looting and other damage to these irreplaceable resources.

Problem #6. Under BLM's preferred management scheme, the vast majority of the 11 million acres of public lands under review will be within 1 mile of a motorized route. In the heart of canyon country near Moab, 84% of the public lands will be within 5 city blocks of a motorized route, leaving few places where visitors can find a quiet, remote place away from the

Acres Protected from Off-Road Vehicles in BLM's Proposed Travel Plans



noise, pollution, and other impacts caused by off-road vehicle use. BLM's plan to heavily blanket public lands with official off-road vehicle routes is at odds with the agency's own visitor survey which revealed that only 7% of visitors to Moab's public lands said their main activity on public lands was using off-road vehicles.

The Easy Fix

The conservation alternatives that BLM has analyzed in its draft plans are not perfect as they do not adequately protect all of the wilderness values identified by the agency itself. However, these conservation alternative scenarios are a positive step toward preserving the roadless and wilderness values of BLM Roadless Areas, while allowing energy development and motorized recreation to take priority on the majority of lands under review. Specifically, the conservation alternatives would allow **oil and gas development on more than half of the 11 million acres** under review, and would provide ample motor vehicle access with **approximately 17,000 miles of motor vehicle routes (about 94% of the routes in BLM's proposed plans)**.

BLM must adopt the conservation alternatives it has analyzed and found to be feasible in order to preserve the wilderness values inherent in these nearly 3 million acres of BLM Roadless Areas. This is an easy choice for the most magnificent lands on the Colorado Plateau.



Limestone Cliffs, © Tom Till.