



# western views

## THE RACE IS ON: Protecting Rocky Mountain Landscapes from Oil and Gas Development

By Mike Chiropolos, Lands Program Director

Oil and gas development on federal lands across the Rockies continues at an unprecedented pace. In 2003, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued a record number of new leases, including dozens on lands with spectacular values for wilderness, cultural resources, and wildlife habitat. The numbers are staggering:

As of July 2004, the Bush administration had issued **nearly 5,000 new leases covering 4.8 million acres** of public lands.

In 2004, an **all-time high** of almost 42 million acres of federal lands were leased for oil and gas development—including more than 35 million acres in the Rockies.

From 2001–03, BLM issued **all-time highs** of at least 3,700 new drilling permits per year.

The permitting pace is so fast and furious that industry has only managed to drill a fraction of the proposed wells—resulting in a backlog of several thousand approved permits on lands waiting to be drilled.

Does all this development contribute significantly to meeting American energy consumption? Judge for yourself: Over the past 15 years, the oil and gas industry produced only enough energy from all federal on-shore leases to satisfy 53 days of U.S. oil consumption and 221 days of natural gas consumption. That's a

questionable tradeoff for sacrificing some of the West's most spectacular landscapes.

Concern across the Rocky Mountain region extends far beyond conservation groups:

In New Mexico, Governor Bill Richardson is taking a stand against proposals to sacrifice Otero Mesa and Valle Vidal to high-density gas development.

In Wyoming, Governor Dave Freudenthal is urging protection for wildlife habitat and landscapes in the Upper Green and Red Desert regions.

In Colorado, local counties and towns are opposed to high-density coalbed methane drilling in the San Juan National Forest and leasing of roadless areas encompassing municipal watersheds in the White River National Forest.

In North Dakota and Montana, new leases provoked protests from the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara) concerned with safeguarding cultural resources.

In Utah, the Outdoor Industry Association protested 14 proposed oil and gas leases along Desolation Canyon due to their incompatibility with recreation and scenery in this world-renowned river corridor.

WRA attorneys are bringing diverse groups together, including conservationists, tribal members, ranchers, and local governments, in a shared mission to save our lands. In recent months, we filed challenges to protect the Little Missouri National Grasslands in North Dakota, the Greater Adobe Town wildlands complex in Wyoming, Thompson Creek and Pinyon Ridge in Colorado, the Strawberry Valley and Diamond Fork watersheds in Utah, and Huerfano Mesa in New Mexico.

## Discovering Utah's Canyons A Recent Trip with Steve Allen

Steve Allen, a leading expert on the lands and history of the Colorado Plateau, recently led a five-day hiking trip through the canyons and slickrock of southern Utah. Participants waded the narrows of Willow and Forty-Mile creeks, viewed ancient rock art panels in Fifty-Mile Wash, and ascended the walls of Coyote Gulch in the shadow of Jacob Hamblin Arch. Most of all, the hikers appreciated seeing this relatively untouched section of Utah's red rock country and learning of WRA's work to ensure that future generations can enjoy it.

Proceeds from the trip benefited Western Resource Advocates' Utah office. WRA sends its sincerest thanks to Steve Allen for sharing his exceptional knowledge, and for his help in raising awareness and funds to protect Utah's wild places.



A participant meanders through Utah's slot canyons.

### A New Look

Sometimes you've gotta freshen up. With this new issue, Western Resource Advocates is proud to present our newly re-designed Western Views. In addition to incorporating our new colors, we've cut the number of pages in half to better conserve resources. We hope you like the new look!



## From the Executive Director

I have now been with this terrific organization for five very busy months and every day brings a new challenge, but also new opportunities. Western Resource Advocates is a group of committed professionals dedicated to restoring and protecting the things that all of us treasure as westerners. It is an honor to join this fine organization.

This summer, the Energy Program released the *Balanced Energy Plan for the Interior West*. This groundbreaking report demonstrates that a clean energy path would not only help save the environment, but would save us money in the bargain. Our next steps include turning the plan's recommendations into policy. A year ago, the Water Program released its *Smart Water* report showing how cities around the region could stretch their water supplies by taking commonsense steps like leak detection and repair. We are now reaching out to several cities to encourage them to take a far more aggressive approach to using water wisely. Our Lands Program has been working to keep oil and gas rigs out of the region's wild lands and to keep ORVs on designated roads and trails. Its challenge may be the greatest, but so much is at stake—from the upper Green River Valley to the Four Corners region. And finally, the Utah Office is striving to protect the Great Salt Lake and Utah's roadless lands in our national forests.

WRA has always been proactive in identifying problems and proposing solutions. We recognize that no success is ours alone—every achievement is built upon the coalitions we form and those we join. This past year has been one of successes, but also of great challenges and a few real disappointments. The new year will likely be no different. But we are committed to this special place called the West, and we appreciate your support—we truly could not do it without you!

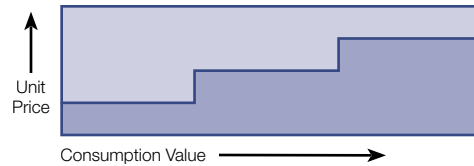
Jim Martin  
Executive Director

## Structuring Water Rates to Promote Conservation

By Don Wojcik, Water Policy Analyst

In the West, precious rivers, streams, and aquifers sustain cities and towns by feeding our urban water supply systems. With this finite supply, we must maintain the delicate balance between providing water that flows through our faucets and keeping water in our rivers to maintain healthy ecosystems. Most westerners place a high value on both uses.

Water rate structures play an essential role in communicating the value of water to water customers, and promote long-term efficient use. **Increasing block rate structures most effectively encourages efficient water use.** Customers who use low or average amounts of water are charged a modest unit price and rewarded for conservation; those using excessive volumes pay higher unit prices.



WRA's *Smart Water* study of regional water use found a correlation between cities with dramatically increasing block rates and those with the lowest *per capita* consumption levels. Along with other conservation and efficiency programs, effective rate structures can help stretch existing water supplies further and avoid much of the cost and controversy that result from large, new water development projects. If designed appropriately, increasing block rates:

- ✓ Provide water at low prices for basic and essential needs, so **all** customers can afford it;
- ✓ Reward conserving customers with lower unit rates for water;



Increasing block rates would require those who use more water to pay accordingly.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DENVER WATER.

- ✓ Assign water supply and development costs proportionately to the customers who place the highest burden on the supply system, and on the rivers that feed the supplies; and
- ✓ Do all of the above while still maintaining a stable revenue flow to the utility.

Throughout our region, a variety of water rate structures exist, ranging from aggressive, efficiency-based designs to rate structures that actually promote **inefficient** water use. Although many municipalities have come a long way in developing and instituting efficiency-based rate structures, many still have a lot of room for improvement. This is precisely why WRA's Water Program is accelerating its efforts to promote efficiency-based rate structures throughout the Southwest.

We have already begun assisting various Colorado municipal governments, water utilities, and environmental organizations in assessing the most effective rate structure options in each community. We will soon expand these efforts to promote efficiency-based rate structure designs in Utah, New Mexico, and beyond.

## Winning One for the Birds: A Notable Victory in Utah

By Anita Schwartz, Communications Director

Because all aquatic life depends on water and 85 percent of native animal species are dependent on riparian zones for all or part of their life cycles, there is a crisis when there is not enough water. Fortunately, WRA has evoked a provision of Utah law that requires that impacts to wildlife, aquatic life, recre-

ation, and the public interest be considered when making decisions about removing water from the state's streams and lakes. WRA successfully used this legal tool to challenge a proposal to take more than 140,000 acre feet of water annually from the immediate tributaries to Great Salt Lake. While the win was

*Continued on Page 4*

## A New Trend in Colorado Wind

By *Melanie Newton, Development Coordinator*

Twenty-three miles south of Lamar, CO is the state's newest and largest wind farm, Colorado Green. The 108 turbines generate 162 megawatts of clean energy and provide enough electricity for nearly 50,000 homes along the Front Range. The real story, however, is what Colorado Green did for Prowers County, and why local farmers and businesses now want to develop their own wind farms.

Colorado Green has been a boon to a county stricken with years of drought and a depressed farm economy. The addition of the wind farm created 10–15 permanent jobs, boosted the morale of the community, and will increase the county tax base by nearly \$2 million a year. Also, landowners who lease their land for the turbines can collect an estimated \$2,000–4,000 in royalties and fees per turbine per year.

The success of Colorado Green and its impact on the local community has inspired farmers and ranchers to start their own commercial projects—a venture that could bring new jobs and revenue to rural areas needing an economic boost. Landowners from Lamar and Springfield have begun measuring their wind resources and working with consultants to help them design their projects. The next step is figuring out how to get their wind-generated electricity to homes and businesses.

Green Power Marketing Director Susan Innis, Boulder Community Hospital's Kai Abelkis, and WRA consultant Mona Newton are investigating ways to do just that. Dubbed "Project Quixote," the effort will



*The past meets the future of wind energy at the Colorado Green Wind Power Project.*

develop a new way for Coloradans to support wind farms—by actually owning the turbines and selling power to a local utility (like Xcel Energy). "By developing a new community-owned wind farm, we're hoping to forge partnerships between farmers and ranchers in the windy Eastern Plains and environmentally conscious businesses along the Front Range," said Susan Innis. "The result will be financially sound win-win collaborations benefiting all of Colorado."

[www.westernresourceadvocates.org](http://www.westernresourceadvocates.org)

## A Note on Giving

In this season of giving, all of us at WRA invite you to join us in protecting the Interior West. Your involvement will help defend and restore essential lands, waters, and habitats, and assure that energy demands are met in environmentally sound and sustainable ways. There are many ways you can help.

Like most charities, our greatest need is for donations. Please take a moment to complete the enclosed reply envelope and give as generously as you can. If you prefer to donate stock, please call Anita Schwartz at (303) 444-1188 ext. 227.

You can also help meet WRA's equipment needs. Our wish list includes a digital camera, new or used 17" computer monitors, flat panel computer monitors, and a color laser printer.

Should you wish to build WRA's base of support into the future, including WRA in your estate plans will be a meaningful way to leave a lasting contribution. Please talk with your estate planning advisor, and be sure to let us know of your plans so that we can properly thank you.

However you choose to support WRA, your contribution will be truly appreciated as we continue our essential work. WRA's success is directly linked to the generosity of its supporters, and we hope that you will join us.

Sincerely,

Eric Hirst  
President of the Board

spot  
light



Anita  
Schwartz

Since joining WRA in August as the Development and Communications Director, Anita has adapted to her new role with confidence and an exceptional drive for getting things done.

Anita knew she was headed for non-profit work since her first job, at age 15, as a Head Start volunteer. After graduating from American University in Washington, D.C., she spent nine years at environmental organizations, interrupted only by working to help renovate The Dairy Center for the Arts in Boulder. "How often do you get a chance to transform an old dairy building into a community arts center?" said Anita. Outside the office, Anita is an active community volunteer who enjoys serving on the boards of both Open Studios and the church she attends.

Anita comes to WRA refreshed after nearly five months of travel through Egypt, India, China, Australia, and New Zealand. "It was a life-changing experience, and an opportunity we could not pass up" Anita says. Her travels provided a global perspective that reaffirmed her passion for environmental protection. "Seeing the air quality problems in China made me just as committed to environmental protection as did the inspiring beauty of New Zealand. Coming home to the American West, and to WRA, offers me a chance to work with others to protect the areas that are closest to my heart."

Anita is thrilled about joining WRA, which she considers a tremendously positive and proactive organization. The feeling is mutual. We have been most impressed with how Anita represents WRA to the community in her vibrant and sophisticated manner.



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**Winning One for the Birds:  
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WRA has successfully protected critical habitat for migratory birds by defeating a proposal to take water from Great Salt Lake's immediate tributaries.

**Winning One for the Birds, cont.**

important to the people who enjoy the lake, it was absolutely essential to the species that rely on its ecosystems.

Great Salt Lake, its islands, and its wetlands are visited by between four million and six million birds annually. Approximately 125 species of birds nest along the shores of the lake, while about the same number of species stop at the lake as they migrate between North and South America. For these birds, the lake provides the necessary food supply to power the rest of their migrations. In recognition of its role in these international flights, Great Salt Lake is designated as one of only 19 sites comprising the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network.

Kudos to Utah's State Engineer for wisely choosing to keep the water where it belongs, and for understanding that reducing the quantity of water that makes its way to the lake would also reduce water quality. Simply put, a loss of water means a loss of the wetlands on which birds and other animals depend. Moreover, as water levels decrease, temperatures increase and pollutants concentrate. This can lead to toxic levels of pollution, life-killing high temperatures, algae blooms, and a loss of oxygen in the water.

WRA's success in the suit, filed on behalf of Utah Council of Trout Unlimited, Utah Rivers Council, Friends of Great Salt Lake, National Audubon Society, and Utah Chapter of the Sierra Club, is a notable victory. Congratulations to Joro Walker in Utah for winning one for the birds—and for everyone else!

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