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Nov. 5, 2008

Re: proposed changes to the Oil and Gas Element and Ordinance: Ecotourism

For the members of the CDRC and County Staff.

Observations: the first draft Factors (maps) and Composite O/G Suitability map fail to protect important cultural and scenic assets in the Galisteo Basin. Ecotourism, an existing economy within the Galisteo Basin, must be better considered in the Oil and Gas Overlay Zoning District.

Tourism creates a major income stream in Santa Fe County and the State of New Mexico. Ecotourism has the potential to create new economic opportunities and serves to protect rather than degrade the natural resources of an area.

According to the State Tourism Department, scenery is the number one draw for tourism in New Mexico. The Galisteo Basin, with its varied geological features and viewsheds, diverse histories, and proximity to Albuquerque and Santa Fe, will become an even more significant cultural and recreation center in the state.

The term *eco-cultural tourism* highlights the sustainable use of natural & cultural resources. Landscape, wildlife and archeological sites of the Galisteo Basin provide economic opportunities for local communities. Of importance, eco-cultural tourism depends on the totality of these assets. Fragmenting them with inappropriate industrial activity would severely degrade the appeal of these assets...thus the concept of a protected eco-cultural tourism zone is valid.

To what extent does the current draft oil/gas ordinance provide protection for these NM cultural and visual resource assets?

The draft Scenic Area Constraints map (Factor 6.3) is severely anemic. The consideration for the viewscape is further obscured and omitted in the Composite Oil / Gas Suitability map to make way for areas designated “most suitable for . . . oil and gas industry”.

In the Scenic Area Constraints, for example, long stretches along NM14, a National Scenic Byway, are designated as a low sensitivity area. The same can be said along the scenic dirt road CR57 (Waldo Canyon Rd). There is little protection for the historical Cerrillos Mining District, a State Cultural Property, or for La Bajada Mesa, the gateway to Santa Fe. If we are to recognize the importance of ecotourism to the residents of the Galisteo Basin and Santa Fe County, the scenic aspects must be given the weight that they deserve both in Factor 6.3 and the Composite map.

In particular, incompatibility issues between industrial and tourism-based economies arise via the expected impacts of exploratory roads and related installations in the viewscape.

We recommend that the importance of these sites and the corridors that connect them be given more weight in the Composite Oil / Gas Suitability map as well as in the constraints maps.

We recommend absolute industrial constraints for our parks, scenic roads and related views to protect them from industrial physical disturbance, traffic, noise and air quality impacts.

We recommend that existing ecotourism be recognized and factored in as areas of high constraints, and ultimately, as a protected zone.

We recommend deeper buffer zones along scenic roads that takes into consideration the particular viewsheds. Roads should include the Turquoise Trail National Scenic Byway (NSB), CR42, NM41, Waldo Canyon Rd. CR57, and the overlooked CR45.

Clearly NM14, as a NSB would be severely impacted by the oil/gas industry. Oil rigs and drill pads with related roads in the views along with undesirable truck traffic on the Byway itself all would be incompatible. Such activity would not be conducive to NM14 performing its role of being a scenic byway. The Scenic Area Constraints map protects little of NM14 especially between Cerrillos and Madrid (where there are two scenic pullouts) and both this map and the Composite map respects little south of Madrid all the way to Golden.

Contrary to industry claims, the industrial impacts of oil and gas exploration and development are much greater than the drill hole and would be incompatible with eco-cultural tourism intention and use.

We suggest that the planning scenario recognize and envision a significant portion of the Galisteo Basin be zoned for eco-cultural tourism, with buffers to protect these considerable assets, and the roads & corridors that connect them.

These many parks, open spaces, protected archeological sites, so far dedicated to public use and preservation, exist in tacit recognition of the extraordinary wealth of natural, cultural, historical, recreational and scenic resources found in the Galisteo Basin.

Planning efforts in the Galisteo Basin should acknowledge and create a community based eco-cultural tourism zone that protects these sites and the interconnecting roadways and wildlife corridors of this region from industrial impacts.

Thank you for considering these issues,

Ross Lockridge, for the RCA
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