

## OVERVIEW

The HD Mountains near Bayfield remain largely the same as they existed when Captain Macomb explored the area in 1859 and have never experienced significant commercial or industrial development. **Now the area is the subject of an industrial development proposal for hundreds of coalbed methane wells and associated roads, pipelines, and powerlines that would forever change the appearance, use, and natural life of the mountain range.**

The HD Mountains include 40,000 acres of ponderosa pine and mixed-conifer forests along the border of La Plata and Archuleta counties in southwest Colorado's San Juan Mountains. The HDs are largely roadless, the only tiny fraction of the San Juan Basin not presently drilled for gas and oil. Until now, the rugged and forbidding terrain of the HDs has protected them from coalbed methane exploitation. The San Juan National Forest is presently analyzing an industry request for 297 gas wells in the *Northern San Juan Basin Coalbed Methane Environmental Impact Statement*.

The HD Mountains contain pristine canyons and undeveloped low-elevation forests. This type of untouched forest ecosystem is rare in the desert Southwest. The HDs contain many of the largest remaining stands of old-growth ponderosa pine in the Southern Rockies, and provide prime wildlife habitat for large mule deer and elk herds, wild turkey, black bear, northern goshawks, and migratory songbirds. The HD Mountains also contain the proposed Ignacio Creek Research Natural Area, recognized as an extraordinarily pristine low-elevation watershed. A large portion of the mountain range is an inventoried roadless area and has been proposed for wilderness protection by citizen groups. The HDs also encompass many hundreds of 1,000-year-old archeological sites once occupied by pre-Puebloan peoples. The HDs provide a treasured recreational setting for local residents who hike, horseback, hunt, and explore throughout the rugged range.

Industry's proposal to exhaustively drill the HD Mountains threatens the area's history, ecology, and recreational use. A consortium led by BP Amoco and including Petrox, Exok, and Elm Ridge proposes about 150 gas wells, 10 gas compressor stations and 60 miles of access roads throughout the largest areas of roadless, old-growth forest across the HD Mountains. The proposal would criss-cross the entire east side of the HD Mountains with wells, pads, compressors and pipelines. The industrial development activities bring noise pollution, additional lights, water and oil spills and accidents, forest fires, and other significant impacts to an area that is basically wilderness.

There presently exist about 20,000 producing gas wells in the entire San Juan Basin (Colorado and New Mexico), with another 15,000 wells planned. The 100 or so wells planned for the HD Mountains Roadless Area represent a tiny fraction of the overall basin.

Industry previously eyed the HDs for coalbed methane drilling in the late 1980's when Amoco Production Company proposed to drill 33 coalbed methane gas wells in the HD Mountains area. Approximately 28 wells were approved, but only 5 were drilled in the early 1990's following Forest Service approval. These wells were drilled in areas of the HD Mountains where roads already existed in the Saul's Creek and Spring Creek drainages. The main roadless area of the HD Mountains remains undeveloped.