

## Land, Water and People

Not all “Facts” Are Facts

By Dan Dallas

The recent oil and gas lease sale stirred up a lot of controversy locally and received attention in local, regional and even national media. Passions were, and still are, high with this issue. People are concerned about the impacts oil and gas drilling may have on water and air quality, wildlife, scenery, safety, and their own quality of life.

The BLM received over 90 protests concerning the 87 parcels proposed for the May 8<sup>th</sup> lease sale. As we now all know, 84 of those parcels, which were all located on National Forest System lands in the Del Norte/South Fork area, were deferred. These parcels were deferred because we felt that some of the issues brought up in the protest letters deserved further analysis. Depending on the results of the analysis, all, some or none of those parcels may be on a future lease sale.

I was impressed with how San Luis Valley residents organized around this issue. Approximately 100 people attended the public meeting organized by the SLV Public Lands Center (SLVPLC). The meetings that were organized by concerned residents were equally well attended.

We received many information requests concerning the parcels proposed for lease and I encouraged my staff to provide good, factual information in a timely manner. In addition, there was some great information provided by other sources from inside and outside the SLV. Unfortunately, there was also a “fact” sheet circulating throughout the SLV and beyond that included blatant misinformation.

For example, the “fact” sheet stated that the Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF) only analyzed 120 acres for oil and gas development. Actually, oil and gas development analysis was completed on the entire RGNF in the 1996 revised forest plan. Because of this analysis, 70,000 acres of the 144,000 acres proposed for the lease sale already had a “no surface occupancy” stipulation.

The “fact” sheet also stated that the SLVPLC did not consult with the counties or Colorado Division of Wildlife. That simply is not true. First, the counties and the CDOW were invited to participate in the forest planning process that led to the 1996 revised forest plan. Second, my staff and/or I met with CDOW and Rio Grande and Saguache County officials at least twice prior to the public announcement of the parcels being proposed for the May 8<sup>th</sup> lease sale.

These are just a couple examples of the misinformation contained in the “fact” sheet that was distributed to the media, public officials, and many SLV residents.

When people feel passionately about a public land issue, some will be very vocal with their concerns. That is a good thing—it shows people care. Unfortunately, in an effort to be persuasive, some people will take great liberties with the truth. As the forest supervisor and center manager for the SLV Public Lands Center, I give my word that I will strive to provide honest, factual information to the citizens of the SLV. I feel it is my job to do this because without good information, we can't collaboratively work together to manage our public lands.

*Dan Dallas is the forest supervisor/center manager of the SLV Public Lands Center. In his spare time, Dan stays busy keeping up with the activities of his wife and two children, or he can be found wandering the hills with a camera, a bow or gun, or a fishing pole depending on the season. He is pleased his kids have reached the age now where he can sometimes indulge both passions at the same time.*