



## Where the Forest Watchers Meet the River Keepers *Your public lands advocacy organization in the San Luis Valley*

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*Fall 2007 Newsletter*

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## Decision on Village at Wolf Creek

On September 20, 2007, the Colorado Court of Appeals upheld the decision of District Court Judge O. John Kuenhold when he overturned the original plat approval by Mineral County Commissioners for the Village at Wolf Creek.

The Developers appealed the lower court decision, stating they did not need to prove year-around access to their land. The Court called that argument "absurd and unreasonable". The Court further

stated that the Mineral County Board of Commissioners "abused its discretion in granting final approval, because the record contains no evidence of year-around access to the state highway system at the time of final approval."

SLVEC and Colorado Wild filed the lawsuit in the fall of 2004.

For more information on the issues with the proposed development, please see the enclosed newsletter.

## SLVEC Needs Your Help

The San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council has worked hard this year to protect the public lands, health and environment in the San Luis Valley. We have enjoyed many successes—including the Court decision on the Village at Wolf Creek, the successful protest of the BLM Lease Sales in Conejos County, and the lawsuit and organization of protest comments to the F&WS on the Baca National Wildlife Refuge. We work to insure that the beauty and quality of life in the San Luis Valley is protected for future generations.

***Please give generously at this time!***

This work requires a great deal of time, effort and monetary assistance. Over one-third of our annual operating budget comes from member-supporters like you.

***Please invest in this important work!*** While we seek other forms of public and private foundation commitment, we cannot continue without your generous support.

## San Luis Hills/Flat Top Mesa on Hold

Thanks to daily briefings from the Southern Rockies Conservation Alliance network, SLVEC was able to respond quickly to news that the BLM had proposed a potential oil and gas lease sale in Conejos County. SLVEC and Cindy Medina, of Alamosa Riverkeepers, worked with the media and local community and organized public meetings to inform the citizens and landowners about the proposed sale. San Luis Hills contains many areas that have been identified as appropriate for Wilderness designation.

SLVEC helped organize protest comments, which were submitted to the BLM on July 18, 2007. Eighteen of the twenty-one protests received by the State BLM Office were from the San Luis Valley. The proposed parcels have been removed from sale consideration at this time.

## **SLV LEAP HIGH kicks-off**

### **Mark Your Calendars!**

The SLV LEAP-HIGH Project (Landscape Environmental Assessment Plan-Health Inspired Goals for Humans) will hold a KICK OFF event in October. **Please join us!**

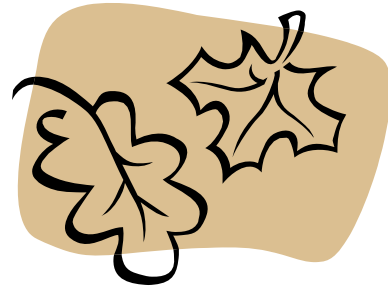
—**Friday, October 19**, there will be an Art Opening at Firedworks Gallery in Alamosa from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. This event will highlight water in artistic expression.

—**Saturday, October 20**, LEAP HIGH will be participating in the Stephanie Miner 5k Run in conjunction with the SLV Regional Medical Center. The run begins at the hospital at 10:00 a.m. and ends at Cole Park.

These events mark the kick-off of the LEAP HIGH program. The program will be collecting, organizing, and disseminating data related to water quality and health issues. In 2006, SLVEC worked with EPA's Environmental Justice program to offer free testing to over 400 household well users in the SLV.

For more information, contact [slvec.org](http://slvec.org). or call 589-1518.

*The mission of the San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council is to protect and restore—through research, education, and advocacy—the biological diversity, ecosystems, and natural resources of the upper Rio Grande bioregion, balancing ecological values and human needs.*



## **F&WS receives almost 50,000 comments on proposed drilling**

When Lexam Explorations, Inc., informed the USF&WS that they intended to exercise their sub-surface mineral rights on the Baca National Wildlife Refuge, the news was met with great concern by the local community.

SLVEC, in May, 2007, filed a lawsuit against the USF&WS requesting that the F&WS follow the requirements of *NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act)* before any exploratory drilling could take place. This would ensure that 1) an environmental analysis of refuge lands is done before drilling; and 2) that the public would have input into the process.

The F&WS agreed. They held a public meeting on August 17, which initiated a thirty day public scoping process that will help shape the issues addressed in the Environmental Analysis (EA).

The response from the public was overwhelming. By the end of Monday, September 17, over 47,000 people submitted comments to the F&WS, including a 40-page document from SLVEC. There were more than 1,000 comments submitted locally.

Lexam plans to drill two 14,000-foot deep exploratory

wells on the refuge lands. The proposed drilling area lies near the Sangre de Cristo fault line, and will pass through two aquifers, containing over thirty layers of strata. Expected impacts to the groundwater in the Valley's closed-basin system are unknown.

Biologic inventories have not been performed on Refuge lands. At the Great Sand Dunes National Park, located adjacent to the Baca National Wildlife Refuge, biologic inventories have revealed areas of global biologic significance, including at least 28 rare, threatened, or endangered species, including the globally imperiled slender spider flower. Colorado Division of Wildlife biologists recently discovered a genetically unique population of the endangered Rio Grande sucker on Refuge lands. This population is considered by CDOW to be critical to the recovery of the species throughout the Rio Grande watershed.

SLVEC wishes to thank all those who participated in this public comment process.