

Title:

Socioeconomic Impacts of a Commercial Oil Shale Operation in the Piceance Basin

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The social infrastructure of the cities and counties affected have not been able to keep pace with the rapid growth in the oil and gas industry and demands upon law enforcement, emergency response, community services, and road and bridge maintenance have increased substantially. This creates a financial and logistical burden on local governments attempting to maintain the level of service expected within the existing communities while at the same time provide the needed services in more remote locations.

According to the 2005 Rio Blanco County Sheriff's Office Annual Report, traffic on the 42 mile stretch of CR5 increased more than 1,200% and consequently so did calls for service. Accident responses increased by 42% on Colorado Highway 64 and 101% on Colorado Highway 13. These figures include property damage accidents resulting from collisions with deer and other animals.

None of the oil shale in situ research, demonstration and development leases are subject to severance and royalty taxes while in the research phase. This places a heavy burden on the affected counties to maintain infrastructure and services.

Coupled with booming gas exploration in the Piceance Basin, the smaller rural towns are stretched to keep up with local services. The question is what price are the local communities willing to pay for the economic boom and what contingency plans are in place once the boom is over.

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