

# The Salt Lake Tribune

Date: May 5, 2005  
Section: Opinion  
Edition: Final  
Page: A16

## Balancing values

PAROWAN GAP BLM should exclude petroglyphs from list offered for drilling

There is still time for the Bureau of Land Management to exclude the archaeologically sensitive Parowan Gap from its list of land parcels to be included in a May 17 auction of oil and gas drilling leases. We fervently hope that it does.

Parowan Gap, 10 miles west of Parowan in Iron County, contains an irreplaceable collection of Native American rock art images so numerous that it has been called the Newspaper Rock of the West Desert. The petroglyphs are recognized on the National Register of Historic Places. Survivors of thousands of years of exposure to the elements, they should be protected against the intrusion of modern man.

Since 1982, about 34 million acres of Utah land have been made available for oil and gas development leases -- 61 percent of the state. Nearly 3.8 million acres of public and private land are currently under lease, but oil and gas are being extracted on just 1 million acres. Though more than two-thirds of the current leases sit idle, the federal government last year offered more than 600,000 more acres of lands in Utah for development -- a record -- and some 300,000 additional acres will be offered this month.

The BLM should make sure, in this frantic drive for domestic energy production, that it does not sacrifice Utah's priceless antiquities.

The BLM is under a congressional mandate to oversee multiple uses for public lands. This directive demands that the agency balance all of the land's resources and potential uses when it makes decisions.

We urge the agency to consider the consequences of drilling on the land currently being considered for lease near Parowan Gap. A half-dozen parcels are within view of the rock art and one includes part of the site itself.

Compromising such a valuable site would be unconscionably out of balance.

It is a privilege for private companies to operate on public lands, and we expect the BLM to live up to its responsibility to make sure that the irreplaceable cultural and wilderness resources in and around Parowan Gap are fully protected.