

Vital Valley worthy of preservation

Home to roaming buffalo, wild turkey, black bear, mule deer, mountain lion, and bald eagle, the Valle Vidal lolls deep in the heart of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. While large populations of reptiles, amphibians, and fish also pulse through this stream-filled wilderness, our little-known national treasure sports New Mexico's largest elk herd and an endangered trout.

A brigade of 3,000 Boy Scouts and a plethora of hikers, hunters, fisherpersons, birdwatchers and snowmobilers bring \$3 million to \$5 million in to the local economy per year. And this is just the tip of the economic iceberg. Much of New Mexico's wealth comes directly from our reputation for pristine wilderness. Industries like tourism, real estate, construction, retail, finance and moviemaking all benefit from our proximity to such enchanting public lands, especially those in the Carson National Forest and particularly in the Valle Vidal, which stretches over the headwaters of tributaries to both the Rio Grande and Canadian Rivers.

Unfortunately the Valley of Abundant Life, as the Jicarilla Apache called it, is being threatened by the El Paso Corporation, a Houston-based energy leviathan, and its aggressive desire to pump methane out from under the Valle Vidal's numerous coal-bedded aquifers. El Paso would bring in a few local jobs for the construction phase, keep a couple crews for extraction and maintenance, and, when all the gas is pumped, they'd layoff. So, on the economics alone, you don't have to be an eco-freak like me to dislike the Bush Administration's plan to pay back a few Texas cronies.

But if you happen to be even a milquetoast greenie, you'll despise the plan, which will mean erosion from a new matrix of roads and utility lines, a smattering of industrial eyesores, and pumping our age-old aquifers dry for the method of choice, "coalbed methane development." Not only is this a waste of our most precious resource, but it also poses serious



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problems for surface water supplies which are directly related to neighboring aquifer levels. This, in turn, damages wildlife habitat and puts the local ecosystem at risk. Meanwhile, some of this pumped water is released into nearby drainages, which often causes pollution downstream. The rest of the water is pumped into large, plastic-lined evaporation ponds for the purpose of, one might suppose, creating monsoons over Oklahoma.

At the far reaches of many permaculture projects, there's often a place called Zone 5. Here, we are permitted to carefully use some of nature's renewable resources, but our primary focus should always be on harvesting information about her basic principles and patterns. On the scale of a statewide design, the Valle Vidal would be the perfect place to claim a Zone 5. Please call anyone in government and insist that the Valle Vidal be preserved not merely because it's the right thing to do for the planet, but because it's better for business, too. This way, even supposed Bush allies might see the light.

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