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> **EDITORIAL Two-Faced Forest Policy**

> August 11, 2004

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> There are several good reasons to protect 40,000
> acres of New Mexico's
> Carson National Forest from gas exploration. For
> one, the alpine meadow
> was donated to the national forest 22 years ago - by
> an oil company -
> for wildlife habitat and recreation. The gift was
> intended to benefit
> the public and the environment, not to help out
> another energy company.
> The land lies next to a Boy Scout camp where for 65
> years youths from
> across the nation have backpacked, ridden horses and
> worked on
> conservation projects.

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> The U.S. Forest Service has determined that gas
> exploration could
> pollute water in the pristine countryside, as well
> as harm wildlife and
> recreation. Foresters consulted with the U.S. Bureau
> of Land Management,
> which is generally friendly to oil, gas and timber
> interests. The
> consensus: Reject the request of natural gas
> producer El Paso Corp. to
> drill in the meadow.

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> Then, as Times staff writer Julie Cart reported
> Monday, came the White
> House Task Force on Energy Project Streamlining - a
> title that tells the
> story. It nagged forestry officials to reconsider.
> Suddenly, the Forest
> Service came out with a report more favorable to the
> El Paso proposal, a
> first step in opening the forest to gas exploration.

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- > Once again, the Bush administration ignored the best
- > science of its own
- > experts, as it did in withholding a report on high
- > mercury levels in
- > women, rejecting the scientific consensus on climate
- > change and banning
- > over-the-counter sales of the so-called
- > morning-after pill. Once again,
- > in the New Mexico forest, a political agenda blurred
- > environmental
- > science and the proper workings of federal agencies.
- > It also overrode
- > the objections of a governor, the communities around
- > the land and the
- > Boy Scouts.
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- > Hold it. Weren't Bush officials the ones making
- > pronouncements a couple
- > of weeks ago about giving states and communities a
- > bigger role in
- > deciding what gets built in their national forests?
- > In that case, the
- > administration was unveiling a rule that would make
- > it easier to build
- > roads through the forests. Under the new process,
- > governors and
- > communities would have a major say in opening areas
- > to development.
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- > The real message seems to be that state and local
- > governments have an
- > important voice on national forests, but only when
- > they're saying,
- > "Drill! Pave! Log!" Governors in other Western
- > states who are trying to
- > preserve wild land from gas and oil leases might as
- > well lack larynxes,
- > at the rate they're heard.
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- > In truth, though local opinions matter, final
- > decisions on forest
- > matters should be made by national foresters, based
- > on science and
- > public benefit. The national forests belong to all
- > the people in this

- > country, not to a state or town. Some resource
- > development in these
- > forests is appropriate, but it ought to be based on
- > the best use of the
- > land, not on the gas company guy having the right
- > ties to the White
- > House.
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