

APPENDIX A

FEDERAL COAL PLANNING PROCESS

The development of federal coal is a tiered process. As the size of the area of consideration is reduced, the amount of data and depth of analysis is intensified. Through this process, attention and detailed analysis becomes focused on those coal tracts most likely to be mined.

Prior to leasing federal coal, the BLM completes two levels of planning:

1. Land Use Planning, where coal deposits acceptable for further consideration are identified.
2. Activity Planning, where specific coal tracts are delineated for leasing.

After a tract has been leased, the State of North Dakota, in concert with the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, analyzes a site-specific mining and reclamation plan, requires bonding and monitors the mining operation.

A description of the two planning processes undertaken by BLM prior to actual leasing or lease offering is provided below. Detailed descriptions are presented in the Final EIS Supplement, Federal Coal Management Program (USDI 1985) and in the federal coal management regulations presented in 43 CFR 3400. A flow chart depicting the general coal planning process is provided at the end of this appendix.

Land Use Planning

During land use planning federal coal is analyzed for development potential and the presence of unacceptable environmental tradeoffs using four broad screens (43 CFR 3420.1-4):

- 1) coal development potential,
- 2) unsuitability criteria,
- 3) multiple-use tradeoffs, and
- 4) surface owner opposition.

The four screens are generally applied to federal coal within the planning area in the order presented unless it is obvious that later screens will apply. Each of the screens is discussed in detail in Appendices B through E.

The major land use planning decision concerning coal is the identification of areas acceptable for further consideration for leasing. The four coal screens constitute the framework used to identify areas obviously not suited to coal mining. Application of the four screens early in the overall coal planning process eliminates most potential environmental conflicts, allows coordination of management concerns and objectives between agencies and publics, and serves to focus future coal management on those areas best suited to mining. In addition to the finding of coal acceptable for further consideration, land use planning includes the identification of data inadequacies, and suggested mitigation or lease stipulations.

Adoption of a RMP by the BLM constitutes a major federal action and requires the preparation of an EIS. Coal-related portions of the alternatives of the EIS are generally based on variations in the application of the multiple-use tradeoff screen. The land use plan and related NEPA documentation ensure opportunities for public input and coordination with state and federal resource management agencies.

Activity Planning

Activity planning provides the opportunity to review specific proposed lease areas in a detailed manner. The aerial scope of activity planning is much smaller than that of land use planning.

Activity planning involves the analysis of many of the same environmental factors as considered during land use planning but on a site-specific basis. Detailed inventories and analyses are conducted, as necessary to allow refinement and implementation of land use plan decisions. Activity planning allows the application of mitigation measures or stipulations prescribed in the land use plan to specific locations such as archaeological sites or wildlife habitats.

Activity planning also includes NEPA compliance; often in the form of an EIS. This analysis may include an assessment of expected cumulative environmental impacts in addition to site-specific analyses. The NEPA process also ensures opportunity for public input and coordination with state and federal resource management agencies.

FIGURE A-1
FLOW CHART OF FEDERAL COAL
PLANNING PROCESS

(Required BLM land use planning steps are presented
in bold type)

Land Use Planning	Activity Planning
— Notice of Intent to Prepare RMP	— Delineate Tracts or Receive Lease Applications
— Call for Coal Resource Information	
— Identify Issues	— Ensure Consistency with RMP
— Initiate Assessments of: Development Potential Unsuitability Multiple-Use Tradeoffs	— Consult With or Notify Governor and Others as Appropriate
— Develop Planning Criteria	— Conduct Necessary Inventories
— Analyze Management Situation	— Modify Tract Boundary if Necessary
— Conduct Necessary Inventory	
— Complete Preliminary Assessments of: Development Potential Unsuitability Multiple-Use Tradeoffs	— Prepare Site Specific Analysis (NEPA Documentation) — Prepare Regional Analysis (NEPA Documentation) if Necessary
— Consult With Surface Owners	— Consult with Governor and Others as Appropriate
— Formulate Alternatives	
— Estimate Effects of Alternatives	— BEGIN LEASE SALE PROCEDURES
— Complete and Document Results of Surface Owner Consultation	
— Select Preferred Alternative and Publish Draft Plan and EIS	
— Select RMP and Publish Proposed Plan and EIS	
— Hold Public Hearing if Requested	
— Issue Record of Decision	
— Identify Areas Acceptable for Further Consideration for Leasing or Exchange	