

ABSTRACT

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region VIII (EPA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Region VI (FWS), the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and various State and Tribal agencies, industry and trade organizations in EPA Region VIII, “partners,” have joined in a coordinated effort to address “problem oil pits.” The composition of the partnership varies within each state based on which state and tribal agency or agencies have responsibilities related to each facility. Examples of state agencies which were members of the partnership are the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission; Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment; Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; Montana Department of Environmental Quality; Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission; the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality; the Utah Division of Oil, Gas and Mining; and the Utah Department of Environmental Quality. The Shoshone, Arapahoe, Ute Mountain Ute, and Northern Ute tribes are some of the tribes involved in the partnership.

Improper construction or operation of pits used by the oil and gas exploration and production industries result in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of mammals and millions of birds each year. Releases to surface and subsurface waters pose a threat to human health and water resources for agricultural, domestic and recreational uses. Data compiled from information and photographs taken during field inspections indicated a strong correlation between bird and wildlife mortality and the extent of the oil saturation of the problem oil pits. Also the same poor management practices which resulted in problem oil pits, tended to be in conjunction with compliance problems which may lead to discharges of oil into the waters of the United States.

The goals identified by the “stakeholders” were: (1) to minimize the potential for bird and other animal mortality from contact with oil; (2) to ensure that these oil facilities are

constructed and managed in an environmentally protective manner in compliance with all requirements and to rectify other existing environmental issues; and last but not least, (3) to protect the health of the community and environmental resources for future generations.

The partners developed processes to gather and evaluate information, including aerial surveys, and to make decisions on the appropriate actions in response to issues. The lessons learned from this close coordination improved their working relationships and enhanced their ability to resolve environmental problems together in the future.

Formal and informal communications with the regulated community have achieved such success that many of the problems identified in the aerial surveys were remedied, before the next bird migratory season began. Many remaining problems will be remedied within one year of identification. Long term strategies being developed will insure that goals are met and a high degree of long term environmental protection is achieved.