

**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
TRES RIOS FIELD OFFICE**

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**February 2013 Oil and Gas Lease Sale
DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2012-0061-EA**

INTRODUCTION:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Tres Rios Field Office prepared an environmental assessment (DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2012-0061-EA) that analyzed the effects of the proposed lease sale of up to 12 parcels (12,175 acres) located in Archuleta, Dolores, La Plata, Montezuma and San Miguel Counties for the February 2013 Oil and Gas lease sale. The Environmental Assessment considered a range of alternatives including Alternative A (Proposed Action), Alternative B, and No Action Alternative.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANCE:

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment for the proposed February 2013 oil and gas lease sale (DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2012-0061-EA), dated August 2012. After consideration of the environmental effects as described in the EA, I have determined that Alternative A (Selected Alternative), with the mitigation measures identified in the EA, will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required. I have also considered the Council on Environmental Quality's criteria for significance (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.27), with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA:

Context

Alternative A is a site-specific action directly involving the lease of approximately 12,175 acres of federal, private, and state surface ownership. The proposal in Alternative A is in an area of the Tres Rios Field Office known for a rich cultural heritage, diverse recreational opportunities, historic agricultural production, and mining properties. Most proposed parcels have historical exploration activity for oil and gas and the Dove Creek Area Parcel (6533) is within the Papoose Canyon Field, which has a number of producing oil and gas wells (see EA, section 4.2).

Intensity

The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Future development of the lease parcels may have minor indirect, short term impacts to resources (e.g., soils, vegetation, and wildlife) as described in Chapter 4 of the EA; however these impacts are not expected to be significant with the incorporation of mitigation and will be further analyzed in site specific NEPA documents at the development stage.

2. *The degree to which the action affects public health and safety.*

The proposed action is not expected to significantly impact public health and safety. The effects of oil and gas leasing are well known and documented. Chapter 4 of the EA analyzes the effects to air and water quality which are not expected to be significant with the incorporation of mitigation measures. Oil and gas leasing is a common practice in the region and no significant impacts to health and safety are known.

3. *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity of historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

As shown in Chapter 4 of the EA, impacts to historic and cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, and ecologically critical areas were all considered when analyzing the Alternative A. As described in the EA, surveys for cultural resources prior to any development would avoid impacts to cultural and historical resources.

The following components of the Human Environment and resource issues are not affected because they are not present in the project area: park lands, prime farmlands, or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.

Wetlands are present in the project area, however as described in section 4.3.1.3.2 of the EA, No Surface Occupancy stipulation CO-28 which restricts oil and gas activities to an area beyond the riparian vegetation zone, would be applied to affected areas.

4. *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Oil and gas leasing has been occurring historically in the region and in the general area, and the effects of oil and gas leasing are generally well understood. In addition, mitigation measures as described in Chapter 4 of EA and incorporated into the selected action will reduce anticipated impacts.

5. *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

The BLM's Colorado State Office conducts quarterly competitive lease sales to sell available oil and gas lease parcels. Effects associated with leasing are well known and documented. Oil and gas leasing has been occurring in the area and the effects are generally well understood. NEPA documents at the development stage will incorporate all new information to analyze site-specific impacts.

6. *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The preferred alternative is within the scope of the Resource Management Plan and is not expected to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Alternative A was considered by the interdisciplinary team within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Significant

cumulative effects are not predicted. A complete analysis of the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the preferred alternative and all other alternatives is described in Chapter 4 of the EA.

7. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

The interdisciplinary team evaluated the possible actions in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions. Significant cumulative effects are not predicted. A complete disclosure of the effects of the selected action is contained in Chapter 4 of the EA.

8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.*

Alternative A will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will it cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. A cultural inventory would be completed before any development and/or consultation with SHPO would be completed in accordance with Section 106 of the NHPA and on cultural resources.

9. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

Mitigating measures to reduce impacts to listed species have been incorporated into Alternative A. All parcels would be subject to Exhibit CO-34 to alert the lessee of potential habitat for a threatened, endangered, candidate, or other special status plant or animal. Also Exhibit CO-15, CO-30, and CO-40 are applied to parcel 6533 to protect sage grouse habitat. Parcel 6401 is within suitable habitat for Pagosa skyrocket (*Ipomopsis polyantha*), which is listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act and to ensure that there will be no effect to this Federally listed species, the following No Surface Occupancy (NSO) Stipulation (CO-08) would apply to Parcel 6401. To reduce the potential environmental effects to bald eagles if development were to occur, stipulation CO-23 and CO-04 would be applied to parcels 6449 and 6402.

10. *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

Alternative A does not violate any known federal, state, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. Representatives of Federal, State, local, and tribal interests were given the opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis process. Furthermore, letters providing notice on the opportunity to comment on the lease sale were sent to interested members of the public and Native American tribes, and posted to the Tres Rios NEPA web site. In addition, the project is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs (as described in section 1.5 of the EA).

This is an unsigned FONSI for public comment

Deputy State Director
Division of Energy, Lands, and Minerals

Date