

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
White River Field Office  
73544 Hwy 64  
Meeker, CO 81641

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**NUMBER:** CO-110-2004-024-EA

**CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER** (optional): Rangely Weber Sand Unit

**PROJECT NAME:** Mellon Hill 3 wells

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** T2N R103W Section 9, 14, 15, 16

**APPLICANT:** Chevron

**ISSUES AND CONCERNS** (optional):

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:**

**Proposed Action:** Chevron would develop three oil wells. One well will be drilled on a pad in section 9 that was reclaimed years ago when the original well on that pad was plugged. Two directional wells will be drilled from a new pad in section 15. About 2.5 miles of pipeline will be built to tie the new wells and the existing Mellon Hill #1 well into the production/injection system. Most of the pipeline will be built on existing disturbance. Total new disturbance will be 4.7 acres.

**No Action Alternative:** No wells would be developed. No well pad or pipeline would be constructed.

**NEED FOR THE ACTION:** Chevron has requested approval of this action to develop their Federal mineral lease.

**PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:** The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP).

Date Approved July 1, 1997

Decision Number/Page: Page 2-5

Decision Language: “Make federal oil and gas resources available for leasing and development in a manner that provides reasonable protection for other resource values.”

**AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES / MITIGATION MEASURES:**

**STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH**: In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in specific elements listed below:

**CRITICAL ELEMENTS**

**AIR QUALITY**

*Affected Environment*: There are no special air quality designations or non-attainment areas in the vicinity of the proposed action.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action*: The proposed action would result in short term, local impacts to air quality during and after construction, due to dust being blown into the air. However, airborne particulate matter should not exceed Colorado air quality standards on an hourly or daily basis.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative*: Impacts are not anticipated from the no action alternative.

*Mitigation*: None.

**CULTURAL RESOURCES**

*Affected Environment*: The proposed action is all located within the Rangely Field which has been inventoried (Larralde 1982) and is covered by an agreement with the Colorado SHPO. No cultural resources were identified in the proposed project area in 1982.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action*: The proposed action will not impact any known cultural resources.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative*: There would be no new impacts to cultural resources under the No Action Alternative.

*Mitigation:*

The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the operator as to:

- whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- the mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not necessary)
- a timeframe for the AO to complete an expedited review under 36 CFR 800-11 to confirm, through the State Historic Preservation Officer, that the findings of the AO are correct and that mitigation is appropriate.

If the operator wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the operator will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction.

All new drilling activities for well on the previously reclaimed will pad will be confined to the existing foot print of the previously disturbed and reclaimed well pad location.

## **INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES**

*Affected Environment:* The area is a salt desert shrub association with clayey and salty soils. Throughout this area cheatgrass is present and presents a threat to revegetation efforts. This grass readily invades disturbed soils.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Seeded with the suggested seed mix, the disturbed area is expected to stabilize in two years. The seed mix contains non-native species which were chosen for their adaptability in this harsh environment and the need to compete against cheatgrass. These non-native species have not been shown to move offsite or to interbreed with species found in the adjacent plant communities. With prompt reclamation and seeding, cheatgrass should be prevented from dominating the project site.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no impacts

*Mitigation:* Standard seed mix two will be used for reclamation.

## **MIGRATORY BIRDS**

*Affected Environment:* With the exception of about 300' of pipeline and the two well pads, this project is confined to existing pipeline rights-of-way that parallel existing well-field access roads, and, as such offer little suitable habitat for breeding birds. The pads and cross-country pipeline parcel involve about three acres of basin big sagebrush-shadscale community that are situated within about 150' of well-field access, a condition that likely limits utility as nesting cover for birds typical of these arid salt-desert communities (e.g., vesper and sage sparrow, western meadowlark, sage thrasher). Although any involvement with suitable nest habitat would be minor (these community types comprise about 10,000 acres in Coal Oil Basin), construction of this project is expected to commence by the end of February and be completed in advance of the nesting season (beginning about May 15).

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Earthwork associated with this project is expected to be completed in advance of the nesting season and would have no potential to interfere materially with nests. Drilling operations would likely extend into the nesting season, but since nest initiation would have been conducted in the face of ongoing pad development, continuation of development activities, confined to the pad, would not be expected to disrupt nesting outcomes (particularly since nest site tenacity increases through the nesting season).

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* None

*Mitigation:* None

## **THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)**

*Affected Environment:* Much of the project area is broadly encompassed by prairie dog habitat. Based on recent site inspections in December and February, prairie dogs are distributed at low density along, and adjacent to the proposed flowline in section 14, and sparingly west along remaining portions of both the flowline and CO<sub>2</sub> line. Prairie dog activity along the existing flowline is primarily associated with an existing pipeline trench (eight single entrance burrows on the trench, four single entrance burrows adjacent to the trench that would likely be involved during right-of-way clearing). The breaking of heavy soils and claypans from earthwork apparently aids prairie dog burrowing, and is not an uncommon situation in the Rangely Field. No prairie dog activity was found along the proposed CO<sub>2</sub> pipeline route south of the proposed two-well pad.

The proposed 2-well pad sits in a narrowly confined valley supporting a basin big sagebrush-shadscale saltbush community. The pad would occupy a small flat (1.5 acres) that shows evidence of prairie dog occupation (37 burrow entrances; six mounded burrow systems). At the present time, this small town appears to be largely inactive with a small number of prairie dogs continuing to occupy the valley northeast of the pad. Prairie dogs are distributed north and east

of the Mellen #2 pad, but the pad itself is heavily overgrown with basin big sagebrush and offers little habitat suited for prairie dog occupation.

Prairie dogs and their burrow systems are important components of burrowing owl (a State threatened species) habitat, as well as potential habitat for reintroduced populations of black-footed ferret. Under the auspices of a non-essential, experimental population rule, ferrets have been released annually southwest and northeast of the Rangely Oil Field since 1999. The rule applies to any ferrets that may occupy or eventually be released in northwest Colorado and northeast Utah. Although there are lesser physical barriers and habitats unoccupied by prairie dog between the release sites and the project site, there is potential that ferrets have reached this portion of Coal Oil Basin. Ferrets breed in February and March with parturition in mid- to late-May. Kits emerge from natal burrows in mid-July.

Burrowing owls are uncommon in this Resource Area. These birds return to occupy a prairie dog burrow system in early April and begin nesting soon after. Young birds are normally fledged by late July with family groups remaining together through September, when the birds leave for southern wintering grounds. BLM has no historical records of burrowing owl nests in the immediate project area.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Surface (i.e., ROW preparation) and subsurface (i.e., trenching and pad cuts) disturbance within past or recently occupied prairie dog habitat would be confined to about 5 and 1.1 acres, respectively. Surface clearing would have no substantive influence on prairie dogs inhabiting this corridor (4 active burrows). Because the proposed flowline is offset 10 feet north of the existing flowline, the 8 active burrows on the existing trench would likely experience no subsurface disruption. Although BLM has no evidence to suggest that ferrets currently occupy Coal Oil Basin, the probability of subsurface disturbance (associated with this project) intersecting a prairie dog burrow system occupied by a ferret in Coal Oil Basin would be remote (e.g., assuming random ferret distribution: 1.1 acres of 7,000 acres of occupied habitat = 0.015%). Further, female ferrets during the reproductive season tend to select the larger and more densely populated prairie dog towns available in the area—this project locale fulfills neither of these criteria.

Until burrowing owls arrive on these breeding ranges in April, there is no credible means of assessing impacts to nest activity. In the event earthwork associated with this project cannot be completed prior to early April, BLM would conduct nest surveys on affected pipeline segments and pads and conditions of approval would be applied to defer activities that may interfere with successful nest outcomes (under provisions of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act).

In both the case of the owl and ferret it would be advantageous to schedule earthwork outside the period between April 1 and July 15. Avoiding this timeframe would provide sufficient time for the rearing, emergence, and dispersal of young from natal burrows and effectively eliminate the likelihood of adversely affecting owl or ferret reproductive efforts. This method of cooperatively minimizing risk to ferrets outside designated ferret management areas is consistent with the Wolf Creek Ferret Management Plan.

This project would have no short or long term influence on prairie dog abundance or distribution by itself or as habitat for black-footed ferret or burrowing owl. Small incremental gains in perennial grass cover associated with successful reclamation, subsurface tillage associated with 2.5 miles of parallel pipeline installation, and removal of unnecessary utility poles as raptor perches may be expected to bolster local populations of prairie dogs and potentially benefit individual burrowing owl and black-footed ferret.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* Although by denying this application there would be no possible involvement of prairie dog burrow systems as potential habitat for burrowing owl or black-footed ferret, it is uncertain what type of habitat alternative routes may traverse or how delays would affect project timing. Denying this application may also detract from the continued cooperation extended to BLM by Chevron in adjusting project work to accommodate important ferret timeframes (e.g., breeding), since the Experimental Non-Essential Rule governing ferret recovery efforts in northwest Colorado does not require special protective provisions outside designated ferret recovery areas (i.e., Wolf Creek or Coyote Basin Management Areas).

*Mitigation:*

Pad construction and pipeline trenching should be conducted outside the period of April 1 to July 15 to avoid subsurface reproductive activities of ferrets and prairie dogs.

If no longer necessary for field operations, it is recommended that the out-of-service power poles north of the road between the #3 and #4 locations be removed.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species:* Public Land Health Standards for those special status species associated with white-tailed prairie dogs, including black-footed ferret and burrowing owl, in Coal Oil Basin are currently met. This project would have no adverse influence on populations, available extent of suitable habitat, or the reproductive activities of these three species. Thus, no influence on meeting the land health standard. Small incremental gains in perennial grass cover associated with successful reclamation, subsurface tillage associated with pipeline installation, and removal of unnecessary utility poles as raptor perches may be expected to bolster local populations of prairie dogs and potentially benefit individual burrowing owl and black-footed ferret.

**THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE PLANT SPECIES** (includes a finding on Standard 4)

*Affected Environment:* There are no Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive plant species occurring in the proposed areas.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* None

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* None

*Mitigation:* None

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species:*  
There is no reasonable likelihood that the proposed action or no action alternative would have an influence on the condition or function of Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive plant species, or meeting the public land health standard.

## **WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID**

***Affected Environment:*** There are no known hazardous or other solid wastes on the subject lands. No hazardous materials are known to have been used, stored or disposed of at this site.

***Impact of Proposed Action:*** No listed or extremely hazardous materials in excess of threshold quantities are proposed for use in this project. While commercial preparations of fuels and lubricants proposed for use may contain some hazardous constituents, they would be stored, used and transported in a manner consistent with applicable laws, and the generation of hazardous wastes would not be anticipated.

***Impact of No Action Alternative:*** No hazardous or other solid wastes would be generated under the no action alternative.

***Mitigative Measures:*** The operator shall be required to collect and properly dispose of any solid wastes generated by this project.

## **WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND GROUND (includes a finding on Standard 5)**

***Affected Environment:*** The well pads are in Stinking Water Gulch which is tributary to the White River below Rangely Colorado. Limited data is available for Stinking Water. Past instantaneous measurements of flow and water quality indicate the water to be high in total dissolved solids.

***Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:*** Impacts to water quality from development of these pipelines would be similar to other surface disturbing activities. Some of the impacts would be exposure of soil surface to wind and water erosion, reduced water quality due to erosion of sediment and salt, off pipeline rights of ways, and piping or rill erosion where pipeline disturbance are exposed to climatic elements. These impacts would be short term until re-vegetation has occurred.

***Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:*** Impacts are not anticipated from not allowing the proposed action.

*Mitigation:* None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for water quality:* The proposed action will have no effect on the watershed's ability to meet these water quality standards.

## **WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN ZONES (includes a finding on Standard 2)**

*Affected Environment:* There is no wetland or riparian habitat within 8 miles of the project site.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* none

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* none

*Mitigation:* none

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for riparian systems:* This project would have no conceivable potential for influencing riparian attributes addressed in the Standards.

## **CRITICAL ELEMENTS NOT PRESENT OR NOT AFFECTED:**

No areas of critical environmental concern, flood plains, prime and unique farmlands, wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, or Wild and Scenic Rivers exist within the area affected by the proposed action. There are also no Native American religious or environmental justice concerns associated with the proposed action.

## **NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS**

The following elements **must** be addressed due to the involvement of Standards for Public Land Health:

## **SOILS (includes a finding on Standard 1)**

*Affected Environment:* The soil-mapping unit for both well pads is #7, which is Billings silty clay loam, 0-5 percent slopes. This soil is very deep and well drained. It is calcareous throughout. Typically the top soil surface layer is about 2" thick. The underlying 4" of material, to a depth of 60 inches or more, is silty clay loam that has a few fine gypsum crystals. Runoff from this soil type is rapid, and the hazard of water erosion is moderate to high. It is an alkaline slopes range site.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Short-term impacts would be expected from any surface disturbing activity. Impacts from the proposed action would be loss of the protective vegetation cover, possible increase in salt and sedimentation during storm events and soil compaction from equipment. These impacts could continue until successful re-

vegetation has occurred. Re-establishing vegetation as soon as allowable would be favorable to controlling any erosion problems that may occur.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* In the no-action alternative, neither the surface disturbance nor impacts to soils resources would occur.

*Mitigation:* If it becomes apparent that salts leaching from soils are becoming a problem on the surface (i.e. large salt deposits begin to appear), the operator will notify BLM. BLM will then coordinate with the operator to implement best management practices to mitigate the problem.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils:* The proposed action will have no effect on the soils' ability to meet the land health standard.

## **VEGETATION (includes a finding on Standard 3)**

*Affected Environment:* The proposed action is located within an Alkaline Slope range site along a drainage bottom. The dominant plant community for this site consists of greasewood, saltbrushes, and big sagebrush, which have an understory of western wheatgrass, and squirreltail. Cheatgrass is an undesirable, invasive, and alien plant species that is prevalent within the locality of the proposed action.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The proposed action would disturb a low seral class of desert shrub community for a total of 4.7 acres. The short-term soil and vegetation disturbances would be offset in the long-term by reclamation of the disturbed area with a seed mix that is suited for this ecological site. As this area has a significant component of cheatgrass within the plant community, successful re-vegetation efforts would increase desirable plant species within the rangelands.

Previously this area has entailed considerable impacts from oil and gas activities from a network of well pads, pipeline corridors, and access roads, which have resulted in a fragmentation and reduction of available, productive range sites.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* None

*Mitigation:* Using Standard Seed Mix #2, revegetate all soil disturbances in a timely manner.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial):* The proposed action would disturb a small segment of the Alkaline Slope range site. As the proposed action is located along existing roads, further fragmentation of plant communities would be minimal.

The locality of the proposed action lacks desirable plant species at an appreciable density and frequency level. This is due to the prevalence of cheatgrass within the vegetative understory. A successful re-vegetation effort would increase preferred plant species within this low producing

rangeland. Thus, the proposed action would not prevent, but may help the area to meet the land health standard.

### **WILDLIFE, AQUATIC** (includes a finding on Standard 3)

*Affected Environment:* There are no aquatic habitats conceivably affected by this action. The White River, representing the nearest aquatic habitat, is separated from the project area by about eight miles of ephemeral channel.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* None

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* None

*Mitigation:* None

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities* (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Terrestrial): This project would have no conceivable influence on aquatic habitat conditions addressed in the Standards.

### **WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL** (includes a finding on Standard 3)

*Affected Environment:* This heavily developed portion of Coyote Basin is inhabited year-round by a small resident herd of pronghorn. These animals are acclimated to routine oil and gas production activities. A number of raptors forage opportunistically during the winter in Coal Oil Basin, the most common being rough-legged and red-tailed hawks, and golden eagle. The project area and the surrounding area provide no special or unique habitat features (e.g., nesting substrate) or forage base for these birds. An abundance of powerline poles in developed portions of the Field exaggerates the number of elevated perches available to raptors, and likely enhances hunting efficiency well beyond that which occurs in a native state.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Post-construction reclamation normally provides herbaceous forage opportunity in excess of that which exists, in many cases helping to replace understories dominated by annual weeds. This project's heavy reuse of existing right-of-way disturbance limits further involvement of woody forage to less than 1 acre of Wyoming big sagebrush and shadscale saltbush. The project would have no conceivable adverse consequence on big game distribution or habitat utility. The short term and routine levels of disturbance associated with pipeline construction and well development would be of no consequence to big game or raptor distribution, or use of adjacent areas within the basin. The potential removal of 3-4 powerpoles along the pipeline right-of-way would have no substantive influence on the extent of foraging habitat available to raptors in Coal Oil Basin.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* Failure to approve this project would likely prompt the applicant to redesign pipeline routing that would unavoidably involve increasing acreage of undisturbed rangeland that has superior utility (relative to

previously disturbed range) in terms of forage and cover resources for resident wildlife. There would be no opportunity under the no-action alternative to improve herbaceous ground cover and composition along the existing right-of-way as cover and/or forage for resident wildlife.

*Mitigation:* None

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities* (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic): Much of the ground cover within the Rangely Field is dominated by annual weeds. Although these sites in and of themselves cannot be considered meeting the definition of the land health standard, the majority of the shrubland communities comprising this landscape likely retain sufficient character to support viable populations of resident nongame species, albeit at population densities much reduced from potential. More pertinent, this action would involve only diminutive expansion of existing pipeline or access corridors that, particularly reclaimed, would have virtually no further influence on the suitability or integrity of habitat for resident wildlife. Subsequent reclamation offers an opportunity to reestablish herbaceous forage and cover conditions (i.e., redevelopment of a perennial bunchgrass component) more consistent with the proper functioning of these arid salt desert communities as wildlife habitat, thus better opportunity to meet the land health standard.

**OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS:** For the following elements, those brought forward for analysis will be formatted as shown above.

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Access		X	
Cadastral Survey	X		
Fire Management		X	
Forest Management	X		
Geology and Minerals			X
Hydrology/Water Rights	X		
Law Enforcement		X	
Paleontology			X
Rangeland Management			X
Realty Authorizations	X		
Recreation		X	
Socio-Economics		X	
Transportation		X	
Visual Resources			X
Wild Horses	X		

## **GEOLOGY AND MINERALS**

*Affected Environment:* The surface geologic formation of the wells is Mancos and Chevrans's targeted zone is in the Weber. During drilling potential water, oil and gas zones will be encountered from surface to the targeted zone. The proposed re-entry well would be re-entry of a well that was drilled and completed in 1947 and since abandoned. The directional wells would be new wells. All of the wells are located in the northwestern corner of the Rangely Field, part of the Weber Sand Unit which has been in effect since 1957.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The cementing procedure of the proposed actions isolates the formations and will prevent the migration of gas, water, and oil between formations. Development of these wells will deplete the hydrocarbon resources in the targeted formation.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* None

*Mitigation:* The Re-entry well must have a cement bond log run on the well bore casing to verify quality and extent of existing cement.

## **PALEONTOLOGY**

*Affected Environment:* The three well reentry areas are located in an area mapped as the Segó Sandstone (9Twe to 1979) which the BLM has classified as a Category II formation meaning it's fossil bearing potential is not well understood in this area of Colorado. The flow lines are partially in the Segó Stone area, where they leave the well pads and start east, then they pass into the area mapped as Manco Shales as they move eastward toward the collection area. The BLM has classified the Manco Shales as a Category II fossil formation, reflecting data that the formation is not particularly known for producing vertebrate fossils in this area though invertebrates are quite likely.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* There is a very small likelihood that scientifically important fossils would be impacted by the proposed action in either the Segó Sandstone or Mancos Shale formations. Any vertebrate fossils located would be considered to be of extreme scientific importance in either formation due to the rarity of such a find. Impacts are only likely if it becomes necessary to excavate into the underlying bedrock formations to excavate the reserve/blooié pit or to bury the pipeline.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no new impacts to fossil resources under the No Action Alternative.

*Mitigation:*

1) If it becomes necessary to excavate into bedrock to construct the reserve/blooié pit on any of the well pads a paleontological monitor shall be present for the excavations.

2) If paleontological materials (fossils) are uncovered during project activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities that might further disturb such materials, and contact the authorized officer (AO). The operator and the authorized officer will consult and determine the best option for avoiding or mitigating paleontological site damage.

## **RANGELAND MANAGEMENT**

*Affected Environment:* The proposed action is located along an existing road within a drainage bottom of Pasture 6 in the Artesia Allotment (06308), which is authorized for sheep use during the winter to early spring periods.

The soils within the project area are principally a Billings Silty Clay Loam and the range site is an Alkaline Slope, which is dominated by a desert shrub and grass community, such as greasewood, big sagebrush, and western wheatgrass. Cheatgrass is an undesirable, invasive, and alien plant species that is prevalent within the locality of the proposed action. These brush/grass communities are utilized by sheep for meeting forage requirements, particularly during winter months. This soil type has a high clay content that is moderate to highly erosive and receives low precipitation with rapid runoff, thus limiting forage production and hampering re-vegetation efforts.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The individual proposed action would have minimal impacts on the authorized grazing use because the amount of new surface disturbance (4.75 acres) is nominal in regards to the scale of the allotments (49,407 total acres). However, previously this allotment has entailed considerable impacts from oil and gas activities, which have resulted in a reduction and fragmentation of available rangelands and in a loss of forage for grazing use.

The short-term soil and vegetation disturbances would be offset in the long-term by reclaiming the disturbed area with a seed mix that is suited for this ecological site. As this area has a significant component of cheatgrass within the plant community, successful re-vegetation efforts would increase desirable forage species within the rangelands.

Grazing use by sheep in the Allotment can be authorized from November 28<sup>th</sup> through April 20<sup>th</sup>. The proposed action would have some limited impacts during this timeframe while sheep are grazing. This is due to the increased activity associated with the development of the proposed action and temporary decrease in rangelands available for grazing. Impacts to livestock grazing may include such influences as a modification in sheep distribution, reduction in available forage, and impediments to livestock grazing and movement.

Overall, this individual proposed action would have no direct impact on the authorized Animal Unit Months (AUMs) in the allotments. A positive benefit would be received through a successful re-vegetation effort, thus increasing preferred forage plants within this low producing rangeland. However, the cumulative impacts from past, present, and possible future oil and gas activities may have a long-term effect on the native range's carrying capacity, thus influencing

the authorized AUMs. This possible affect would be determined during the grazing permit renewal process.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* None

*Mitigation:* None

## **VISUAL RESOURCES**

*Affected Environment:* These wells are in an area classified as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class 3. VRM Class 3 management allows for development as long as the development does not dominate the new landscape.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* These wells and most of the pipelines will be on existing roads, thus visual impacts will be minimal. This project will comply with the guidelines for VRM Class 3 with mitigation as listed below.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* No impacts.

*Mitigation:* Above ground facilities shall be painted Desert Brown (Munsell Color Chart 10 YR 6/3) or equivalent, to match the surroundings. Areas not needed for production shall be reclaimed in a timely manner.

**CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY:** Cumulative impacts from oil and gas development were analyzed in the White River Resource Area Proposed Resource Mangement Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (PRMP/FEIS) completed in June 1996. Current development, including the proposed action, has not exceeded the cumulative impacts from the foreseeable development analyzed in the PRMP/FEIS.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Area of Responsibility</b>
Carol Hollowed	Hydrologist	Air Quality
Tamara Meagley	NRS	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Tamara Meagley	NRS	Threatened and Endangered Plant Species
Michael Selle	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources Paleontological Resources
Robert Fowler	Forester	Invasive, Non-Native Species
Ed Hollowed	Biologist	Migratory Birds
Ed Hollowed	Biologist	Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Animal Species, Wildlife
Marty O'Mara	Petroleum Engineer	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
Carol Hollowed	Hydrologist	Water Quality, Surface and Ground Hydrology and Water Rights
Ed Hollowed	Biologist	Wetlands and Riparian Zones
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness
Carol Hollowed	Hydrologist	Soils
Jed Carling	Rangeland Management Specialist	Vegetation
Max McCoy	NRS	Access
Ken Holsinger	NRS	Fire Management
Robert Fowler	Forester	Forest Management
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals
Jed Carling	Rangeland Management Specialist	Rangeland Management
Penny Brown	Realty Specialist	Realty Authorizations
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation
Max McCoy	NRS	Transportation
Max McCoy	NRS	Visual Resources
Valerie Dobrich	NRS	Wild Horses

# **Finding of No Significant Impact/Decision Record (FONSI/DR)**

## **CO-110-2004-024-EA**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)/RATIONALE:** The environmental assessment and analyzing the environmental effects of the proposed action have been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures result in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

**DECISION/RATIONALE:** It is my decision to approve the development of Wells #A11X, A10X, and the WP2 as described in the proposed action, with the mitigation measures listed below. This development, with mitigation, is consistent with the decisions in the White River ROD/RMP, and environmental impacts will be minimal.

### **MITIGATION MEASURES:**

1. The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the operator as to:

- whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- the mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not necessary)
- a timeframe for the AO to complete an expedited review under 36 CFR 800-11 to confirm, through the State Historic Preservation Officer, that the findings of the AO are correct and that mitigation is appropriate.

If the operator wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the operator will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction.

2. All new drilling activities for the reentry shall be confined to the existing foot print of the previously disturbed and reclaimed well pad location.

3. Standard seed mix two will be used for reclamation:

SPECIES (VARIETY)	LBS. PLS/ACRE
Western wheatgrass (Arriba)	3
Pubescent wheatgrass (Luna)	2
Russian wildrye (Bozoisky)	2
Crested wheatgrass (Fairway/Ephraim)	2
Fourwing saltbush (Wytana/Rincon)	2

4. The operator shall be required to collect and properly dispose of any solid wastes generated by this project.

5. If it becomes apparent that salts leaching from soils are becoming a problem on the surface (i.e. large salt deposits begin to appear), the operator will notify BLM. BLM will then coordinate with the operator to implement best management practices to mitigate the problem.

6. The re-entry well should have a cement bond log run on the well bore casing to verify quality and extent of existing cement.

7. If it becomes necessary to excavate into bedrock to construct the reserve/bloolie pit on any of the well pads a paleontological monitor shall be present for the excavations.

8. If paleontological materials (fossils) are uncovered during project activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities that might further disturb such materials, and contact the authorized officer (AO). The operator and the authorized officer will consult and determine the best option for avoiding or mitigating paleontological site damage.

9. Above ground facilities shall be painted Desert Brown (Munsell Color Chart 10 YR 6/3) or equivalent, to match the surroundings. Areas not needed for production shall be reclaimed in a timely manner.

10. Pad construction and pipeline trenching should be conducted outside the period of April 1 to July 15 to avoid subsurface reproductive activities of ferrets and prairie dogs.

11. If no longer necessary for field operations, it is recommended that the out-of-service power poles north of the road between the #3 and #4 locations be removed.

12. Above ground facilities shall be painted Desert Brown (Munsell Color Chart 10 YR 6/3) or equivalent, to match the surroundings. Areas not needed for production shall be reclaimed in a timely manner.

NAME OF PREPARER: *Max McCoy*

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: *SAP*

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: *[Signature]*  
Action Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: *2/13/04*

ATTACHMENTS: Map of the Location of the Proposed Action

# Location of Proposed Action CO-110-2004-024-EA

