

reading copies will also be available at the following Bureau of Land Management locations: Office of External Affairs, Main Interior Building, Room 6214, 18th and C Streets NW, Washington, DC 20240; External Affairs Office; Montana State Office, 5001 Southgate Drive, Billings, MT 59107; Miles City Field Office, 111 Garryowen Road, Miles City, MT 59301.

The BLM RMP process includes an opportunity for review of BLM's proposed decisions by filing a plan protest with the BLM's Director. Any person or organization that participated in the planning process and has an interest which is, or may be, adversely affected by approval of this proposed Plan Amendment may protest the plan. Careful adherence to the following guidelines will assist in preparing a protest:

Only those persons or organizations that participated in the planning process may protest. A protesting party may raise only those issues that were commented on during the planning process. However, additional issues may be raised at any time and should be directed to the Miles City Field Office for consideration in plan implementation as potential plan amendments or as otherwise appropriate. In order to be considered complete, a protest must contain at a minimum, the following information:

- Name, mailing address, telephone number, and interest of the person filing the protest
- Statement of the issue being protested
- Statement of the portion of the plan being protested

To the extent possible, this should be done by reference to specific pages, paragraphs, sections, tables, and maps in the Final EIS and proposed Amendment. A copy of all documents addressing the issue submitted during the planning process or a reference to the date the issue was discussed for the record. A concise statement explaining why the BLM State Director's decision is believed to be incorrect is a critical part of the protest. It is important to take care to document all relevant facts and reference or cite the planning documents, environmental analysis documents, and available planning records (meeting minutes, summaries, correspondence). A protest without any supporting data will not provide the BLM with sufficient information to assess the protest, and therefore, the Director's review will be based on existing analysis and supporting data.

ADDRESSES: All protests on BLM's proposed decisions must be filed in

writing to: (Regular Mail) Director, Bureau of Land Management, Attention: Ms. Brenda Williams, Protest Coordinator, PO Box 66538, Washington DC 20035; or (Overnight Mail) Director, Bureau of Land Management, Attention: Ms. Brenda Williams, Protest Coordinator, 1620 L Street, NW., Room 1075, Washington, DC 20036.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Final EIS and proposed plan amendments are a joint effort between the BLM and the State of Montana. They are being prepared to analyze impacts to lands and resources as a result of proposed oil and gas development, primarily coal bed methane. The current Powder River and Billings RMPs, as amended by BLM's 1994 Oil and Gas Amendment of the Billings, Powder River, and South Dakota RMPs, support limited conventional oil and gas development and limited coal bed methane exploration and production. About 9,500 conventional oil and gas wells (all ownership categories) are located in the planning area. The Final EIS indicates that the 20-year expansion in development could result in the drilling of up to 26,000 coalbed methane wells (8,500 to 16,400 of which are expected to be producing wells) and 450 to 1,775 conventional oil and gas wells within the Billings and Powder River RMP areas.

The Final EIS and proposed amendments are being prepared to analyze this increased interest in oil and gas activity. The five alternatives developed by BLM and the State present a range of management scenarios to address the issues: Alternative A—existing management (No Action); Alternative B—emphasize soil, water, air, vegetation, wildlife, and cultural resources protection; Alternative C—emphasize coal bed methane development; Alternative D—encourage coal bed methane exploration and development while maintaining existing land uses; and Alternative E—the BLM and State Preferred Alternative, which combines features of Alternatives B through D and manages development of CBM in an environmentally sound manner. The Final EIS discloses the environmental consequences of each alternative.

A copy of the Final EIS and proposed Amendment has been sent to all individuals, agencies, and groups who have expressed interest or as required by regulation or policy. Copies are also available upon request from the BLM at the address listed above.

Four designated cooperating agencies helped BLM and the State prepare the EIS: the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the

United States Department of Energy, the Crow Tribe, and the United States Environmental Protection Agency. Consultation with both the Crow and Northern Cheyenne tribes has taken place throughout the process to gather their input and concerns. Consultation with FWS has occurred, and the BLM has also met with individuals from the general public, special interest groups, industry, and local governments upon their request. The Northern Cheyenne Tribe has declined to become a cooperating agency, but was invited by BLM to participate in all cooperating agency activities.

The BLM and the State conducted public hearings across Montana on the Draft EIS and Amendment. The time and locations of the hearings were announced in local news releases.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mary Bloom, Coal Bed Methane Program Manager, Bureau of Land Management, 111 Garryowen Road, Miles City, MT 59301, (406) 233-3649.

Dated: December 17, 2002.

Thomas P. Lonnie,
Acting State Director.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[WY-090-03-1610-DQ]

Notice of Availability of the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Powder River Basin Oil and Gas Project and Proposed Resource Management Plan Amendments; Johnson, Sheridan, Campbell, and Converse Counties, WY

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Availability (NOA) of Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and Proposed Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendments.

SUMMARY: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announces the availability of the FEIS for the Powder River Basin Oil and Gas Project and Proposed Plan Amendments to the Buffalo RMP (1985), Platte River RMP (1985) and Thunder Basin National Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) (Forest Service 2002). The FEIS documents the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts from the development of oil and gas resources within the project area in Sheridan, Campbell, Johnson, and Converse Counties, Wyoming. The FEIS