

Reclamation Plan, Panels F and G Extension.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Pocatello Field Office and the Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (FS), Caribou-Targhee National Forest, will jointly prepare an EIS to determine and analyze the effects of a proposed phosphate mine and reclamation plan on people and the environment. BLM will serve as the lead agency. Plans have been developed and submitted for agency review for an extension of open pit mining operations at the J.R. Simplot Company (Simplot) Smoky Canyon Phosphate Mine in Caribou County, Idaho, located approximately 20 miles west of Afton, Wyoming. Simplot has operated existing Smoky Canyon Mine since 1983 and within a few years will complete mining of currently permitted reserves.

Agency Decisions: The BLM Idaho State Director or delegated official will make a decision regarding approval of the proposed mine and reclamation plan and appropriate land use authorizations (including a proposed 520 acre modification to I-27512) on leased lands. Decisions will be based on the EIS and any recommendations the FS may have regarding surface management of leased National Forest System lands. The Caribou-Targhee National Forest Supervisor makes recommendations to the BLM concerning surface management and mitigation on leased lands within the Caribou-Targhee National Forest and makes decisions on mine-related activities which occur off-lease. The Army Corps of Engineers may also make decisions related to permits under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

DATES: Written comments concerning the scope of the analysis should be received within 30 days of the date of publication of this notice in the **Federal Register**. A draft EIS is expected to be completed by March of 2005. A final EIS is expected in September of 2005.

Scoping Procedure: The scoping procedure to be used for this EIS will involve: Notification in the **Federal Register**; a mailing to interested and potentially affected individuals, groups, Federal, State and local government entities eliciting comments, issues and concerns; local news releases or newspaper legal notices; and public scoping meetings.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments to: Panels F and G Extension EIS, Bureau of Land Management, Pocatello Field Office, 1111 N. 8th Ave., Pocatello,

Idaho 83201. Email: ID_F_and_G_Panel_EIS@blm.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

James Blair, Bureau of Land Management, Pocatello Field Office, 1111 N. 8th Ave., Pocatello, Idaho 83201, phone (208) 478-6384; or Scott Gerwe, Caribou-Targhee National Forest, Soda Springs Ranger District, 410 E. Hooper Ave., Soda Springs, Idaho 83276, phone (208) 547-4356. Information is also available at: http://www.id.blm.gov/offices/pocatello/sim_fg.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed new extension of mining operations in Panels F and G lie within the Caribou-Targhee National Forest on lands administered by the FS and Federal mineral leases administered by the BLM. Mining as proposed would take place on Panel F, including a lease modification (enlargement) of I-27512, and Panel. These existing Federal mineral leases are adjacent to the southwest portion of the existing mine and were previously issued to Simplot by competitive bid in January of 2001 and October of 1950 respectively. Environmental impacts of the proposed mining operations and reasonable alternatives will be analyzed in the EIS. Appropriate mitigation measures will also be formulated.

The proposed mining activities consist of two open pits—Panel F on Federal phosphate lease I-27512 (sometimes referred to as the Manning Creek lease) and Panel G on Federal phosphate lease I-01441 (sometimes referred to as the Deer Creek lease), topsoil stockpiles, mine equipment parking and service areas, access and haul roads, a power line extension from the existing Smoky Canyon loop, permanent external overburden storage areas, and runoff/sediment control facilities. A new haul/access road to transport ore to the existing Smoky Canyon mill is proposed to be constructed from the south end of the existing Panel E approximately 0.7 miles to the proposed Panel F. As operations move south to Panel G, another haul road is proposed to transport ore 7.7 miles from Panel G north to Panel F. Much of these activities are proposed to occur within the FS Sage Creek inventoried roadless area.

As proposed, the existing Smoky Canyon Mine, maintenance, administrative, and milling facilities would continue to be used. However, because G panel lies several miles south of the currently existing maintenance and fuel facilities, Simplot's plans propose mine support facilities at the

new panels including: equipment ready lines, electrical substations, warehouse and storage areas, lunch rooms, repair shops, restrooms, fuel and lubricant storage and dispensing facilities and blasting supplies.

Ore from the new panels would be hauled in trucks over new and existing haul/access roads to the existing Smoky Canyon mill facilities to be concentrated. Ore concentrate from the mill would be transported to the Simplot fertilizer plant in Pocatello, Idaho via the existing slurry pipeline system. Mill tailings would continue to be deposited in the currently approved and permitted tailings disposal facilities located on Simplot property east of the mill.

Initially, overburden generated from Panel F would be trucked to the existing Panel E open pit and used as backfill. Excess waste rock is proposed to be permanently placed in a 35-acre pit overfill fill on-lease. Remaining overburden from Panel F would then be placed as backfill in Panel F as soon as practical. Overburden generated from mining Panel G would be permanently placed in 132 acres of external overburden fills on-lease at Panel G as well as backfill in the Panel G open pit.

Disturbed lands directly resulting from the proposed activities total about 1,325 acres. New pits would disturb approximately 842 acres of which approximately 796 acres would be backfilled and reclaimed. Forty-six acres of highwall and pit bottoms would remain after reclamation is complete. The remaining 23 acres of the Panel E (currently approved and active) open pit would also be backfilled with overburden from Panel F. This pit is currently permitted to be left open. The rest of the disturbed acreage would consist of approximately 307 acres of roads, 167 acres of overburden disposal areas, and 9 acres of runoff management facilities, water monitoring facilities, and topsoil piles. Each would be reclaimed. The FS Sage Creek inventoried roadless area overlaps large portions of the proposed mine and haul road disturbance areas.

Potential impacts to surface resources and water quality include erosion, sediment, and dissolved contaminants such as selenium. Simplot has proposed to implement practices designed to reduce, eliminate, or mitigate these impacts. Suitable topsoil would be salvaged from disturbed areas for use in reclamation. Reclamation of mining disturbances include: removal of facilities and equipment, backfilling pits, regrading slopes, restoring drainages, spreading topsoil, stabilizing surfaces, revegetation, testing and