

The public is encouraged to help identify these questions and concerns during the scoping phase.

An interdisciplinary approach will be used to develop the plan in order to consider the variety of resource issues and concerns identified. Disciplines involved in the planning process will include specialists with expertise in minerals and geology, forestry, range, fire and fuels, outdoor recreation, archaeology, paleontology, wildlife and fisheries, lands and realty, hydrology, soils, sociology and economics.

The following planning criteria have been proposed to guide development of the plan, avoid unnecessary data collection and analyses, and to ensure the plan is tailored to the issues. Other criteria may be identified during the public scoping process. After gathering comments on planning criteria, the BLM will finalize the criteria and provide feedback to the public on the criteria to be used throughout the planning process.

- The plan will be completed in compliance with FLPMA and all other applicable laws.
- The planning process will include an EIS that will comply with NEPA standards.
- The plan will establish new guidance and identify existing guidance upon which the BLM will rely in managing public lands within the Butte Field Office.
- The RMP/EIS will incorporate by reference the *Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management*, the *Off-Highway Vehicle EIS and Plan Amendment for Montana, North Dakota, and Portions of South Dakota*; and, when signed, the *Montana/Dakotas Statewide Fire Management Plan*.
- The RMP/EIS will incorporate by reference all prior Wilderness designations and Wilderness Study Area findings that affect public lands in the planning area.
- The plan will result in determinations as required by special program and resource specific guidance detailed in Appendix C of the BLM's Planning Handbook.
- The plan will recognize the State's responsibility to manage wildlife populations, including uses such as hunting and fishing, within the planning area.
- Decisions in the plan will strive to be compatible with the existing plans and policies of adjacent local, State, tribal, and Federal agencies as long as the decisions are in conformance with legal mandates on management of public lands.

- The scope of analysis will be consistent with the level of analysis in approved plans and in accordance with Bureau-wide standards and program guidance.

- Resource allocations must be reasonable and achievable within available technological and budgetary constraints.

- The lifestyles and concerns of area residents will be recognized in the plan.

The BLM is also requesting public input for nominations considered worthy of ACEC designation. To be considered as a potential ACEC, an area must meet the criteria of relevance and importance as established and defined in 43 CFR 1610.7-2. Nominations must include descriptive materials, detailed maps, and evidence supporting the "relevance" and "importance" of the resource or area. There is currently one ACEC within the Butte FO boundary; the Sleeping Giant ACEC in Lewis and Clark County was designated by the Headwaters RMP in 1984. All ACEC nominations within the planning area will be evaluated during development of the RMP.

Dated: September 12, 2003.

Richard M. Hotaling,

Field Office Manager.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[UT080-1310-00]

Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the Greater Deadman Bench Oil and Gas Producing Region Field Development Project, Uintah County, UT

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Vernal Field Office, Vernal, Utah, will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS will focus on Questar Exploration and Production Company's (QEP) proposed gas and oil development on about 99,000 acres in the Greater Deadman Bench oil and gas production region.

DATES: Public scoping comments will be accepted on or before February 4, 2004. A public scoping open house and information meeting will be held on

January 14, 2004 from 7-9 p.m., at the Uintah County Commission Chambers, 147 E Main Street, Vernal, Utah. If you have any information, data, concerns, or suggestions related to the potential impacts of the proposed action, including the issues identified above, please submit them to the address listed below.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The project area, located about 20 miles south of Vernal, Utah, involves about 85% BLM-administered lands (83,864 acres); 12% (11,448 acres) State of Utah-administered lands; and, 3% (3,473 acres) patented land. Currently 278 oil and water-injection wells and about 300 gas wells with their attendant service roads exist within the project area. The proponent anticipates the drilling of up to 1239 new wells over a period of 10 years, or until the resource base is fully developed. Of these new wells, 826 would be new locations and 470 would be twins drilled from existing locations (representing 38% of the total new wells that would be drilled). Required infrastructure includes electric power lines, roads, oil and gas flow lines and pipelines, well pads (with pumping units for oil wells), central facilities, water injection facilities, gas treatment and compression facilities. Gas would be transported via pipeline to centralized compression and treatment facilities. Produced water would be trucked or piped to one of several existing QEP water injection plants where it would be re-injected into the oil reservoir or disposal zone via an injection well system.

Major issues at this time include potential impacts on desert and semi-desert ecosystems and their dependent wildlife species (including antelope, sage grouse, white-tailed prairie dog colonies and their associated species), vegetation (including noxious weeds and reclamation), riparian habitat associated with the Green River corridor. Alternatives identified at this time include the proposed action and the no action alternatives.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jean Nitschke-Sinclear, (435) 781-4437 or e-mail: jean_nitschke-sinclear@blm.

ADDRESSES: Written scoping comments should be sent to: Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management, Vernal Field Office, 170 South 500 East, Vernal, Utah 84078, Attn: QEP Field Development Project.

Comments, including names and street addresses of respondents will be available for public review at the BLM Vernal Field Office and will be subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). They may be