

4.4. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

4.4.1. THE PROPOSED RMP AND ALTERNATIVES A, B, C AND E

The Hill Creek Extension of the Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation in Uintah County has high potential for oil and gas occurrence (USDI, BLM, Mineral Potential Report for the Vernal Planning Area, June, 2004). It could be expected, therefore, that full development of federal minerals (188,500 acres) and adjacent Indian minerals (113,684 acres) for oil and gas would occur. In addition, the infrastructure development, such as pipelines access roads and compressors would facilitate development on adjacent Indian mineral areas inside and outside the Hill Creek Extension.

However, estimates of future revenue generated from anticipated well field development are uncertain. The uncertainty of future market conditions contributes to the unknown factors. Primary among non-market uncertainties is the irregular nature of natural gas reservoirs, which are often discontinuous and localized. Uncertainties in estimating future revenues from natural gas production also arise from the difficulty in estimating gas production and capitalization for future natural gas development (BLM 1999). Current seismic projects in this area are attempting to define potential natural gas reservoirs.

On federal mineral areas, the Tribe would benefit from revenue derived from granting rights-of-way to the oil and gas industry across Indian surface. Should similar development occur on adjacent areas of Indian minerals, the Tribe would benefit from oil and gas royalties. In addition, it can be expected that several Tribal contractors would contribute to the local workforce constructing roads, well pads, and pipelines.

Well field development would not be in immediate proximity to a Tribal community. The nearest community is located approximately 10 miles to the north at the settlement of Ouray. It is possible that this town could experience an increase in exposure to road traffic, including large rigs and trucks used to service the oil fields, increased air pollution, fugitive dust, spills, and an impact to water resources. Residents in the settlement of Ouray may be subject to increased health risks as a result of an increase in oil and gas development in nearby areas. Therefore, Alternative B would have the greatest potential for adverse impacts to the community with and estimated 6,391 wells, followed by the Proposed RMP with 6,342.

Should full development of oil and gas resources occur, important Tribal traditional lifeways and religious sites would be at high risk. In general, the Northern Ute Tribe maintains the northern half of the Hill Creek Extension as a sensitive religious and cultural area and the southern half as a sensitive wilderness/wildlife area. The highest of these values is along Willow Creek and the higher elevation Book Cliffs divide. The Hill Creek Extension Book Cliffs "wilderness" is where relatively undisturbed natural values interrelate to Tribal lifeways and religious pursuits.

In these Tribal sensitive areas, construction, operation and sights and sounds of oil and gas wells and associated support facilities would degrade the roadless and natural character of undisturbed areas. In addition, intensive oil and gas development could depress or replace Tribal livestock

grazing. Similar to other nearby areas on the public lands, the cumulative surface disturbance and density of well spacing would change the natural landscape into an industrial landscape.

The industrial landscape would decrease opportunities for big game hunting and the gathering of plants and other materials for ceremonies as traditional Tribal activities. These areas are primarily associated with places where ancient activities were conducted, such as camps, burial sites, and areas where artifacts, rock art, and lithic scatters are located (USDI, BLM, Ouray to Interstate 70 Highway Draft Environmental Impact Statement, September, 1992).

A disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effect on the Northern Ute Tribe would not result from this alternative. However, extensive future development would be a tradeoff between Tribal economic benefits versus loss of traditional lifeways, ethnographic and religious values.

4.4.1.1. MITIGATION

Partial mitigation would be avoidance of sensitive areas. Tribal consultation would be conducted for areas where conflicts arise between traditional Ute values and proposed development. Tribal mitigation would be considered and followed as appropriate. Where federal mineral rights do not exist, the Tribe might restrict development in areas of special significance.

4.4.2. ALTERNATIVE D (NO ACTION)

The Hill Creek Extension of the Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation in Uintah County has high resource potential for oil and gas (USDI, BLM, Mineral Potential Report for the Vernal Planning Area, June, 2004). It should be expected, therefore, that development of Indian oil and gas resources (113,684 acres) would continue. In addition, infrastructure development, such as pipelines access roads and compressors would facilitate development on adjacent Indian mineral areas outside the Hill Creek Extension. However, under this alternative, federal minerals within the Hill Creek Extension (188,500 acres) would not be developed.

Estimates of future revenue generated from anticipated well field development are uncertain. The uncertainty of future market conditions contributes to the unknown factors. Primary among non-market uncertainties is the irregular nature of natural gas reservoirs, which are often discontinuous and localized. Uncertainties in estimating future revenues from natural gas production also arise from the difficulty in estimating gas production and capitalization for future natural gas development (USDI, BLM, Costilla Energy Inc. Hill Creek Unit Well field Development Environmental Assessment/RMP Plan Amendment, December, (BLM 1999). Current seismic projects in this area are attempting to define potential natural gas reservoirs.

Well field development would not be in proximity to a Tribal community. The nearest community is located approximately 10 miles to the north at the settlement of Ouray. Therefore, oil and gas development would not expose this community or the public-at-large to known health risks or environmental hazards.

Should full development of oil and gas resources occur, important Tribal traditional lifeways and religious sites would be at high risk. In general, the Northern Ute Tribe maintains the northern half of the Hill Creek Extension as a sensitive religious and cultural area and the southern half as a sensitive wilderness/wildlife area. The highest of these values is along Willow Creek and the higher elevation Book Cliffs divide. The Hill Creek Extension Book Cliffs "wilderness" is where relatively undisturbed natural values interrelate to Tribal lifeways and religious pursuits.

In these Tribal sensitive areas, construction, operation and sights and sounds of oil and gas wells and associated support facilities would degrade the roadless and natural character of undisturbed areas. In addition, intensive oil and gas development could depress or replace some Tribal livestock grazing. Similar to other nearby areas on the public lands, the cumulative surface disturbance and density of well spacing would change the natural landscape into an industrial landscape.

The industrial landscape would decrease opportunities for big game hunting and the gathering of plants and other materials for ceremonies as traditional Tribal activities. These areas are primarily associated with places where ancient activities were conducted, such as camps, burial sites, and areas where artifacts, rock art, and lithic scatters are located (USDI, BLM, Ouray to Interstate 70 Highway Draft Environmental Impact Statement, September, 1992).

A disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effect on the Northern Ute Tribe would not result from this alternative. However, future extensive development would be a tradeoff between Tribal economic benefits versus loss of traditional lifeways, ethnographic and religious values.

4.4.2.1. MITIGATION

Partial mitigation could include avoidance of sensitive areas. Areas or artifacts could be cleared by Tribal traditional ritual, as appropriate. The Tribe could restrict development in areas of special significance.