

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management**

Unsigned Finding of No Significant Impact

Environmental Assessment

DOI-BLM-UT-W010-2018-0026-EA

**March 2019 Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale
Salt Lake Field Office Area Parcels**

Location: Townships 5-8 North, Ranges 6-7 East, multiple sections, Salt Lake Meridian, Rich and Morgan Counties, Utah.

Applicant/Address: Not Applicable.

January 2019

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March 2019 Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale Salt Lake Field Office Area Parcels

Finding Of No Significant Impact Determination

Based on my review of the March 2019 Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale, Salt Lake Field Office (SLFO) Area Parcels, Environmental Assessment (“EA”) DOI-BLM-UT-W010-2018-0026-EA, and considering the criteria for significance provided by the Council on Environmental Quality (“CEQ”) regulations at 40 C.F.R. 1508.27, I have determined that issuing oil and gas leases for the seven (7) parcels analyzed in Alternative A of the EA and listed in the Notice of Competitive Lease Sale, does not constitute a major federal action that will have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general project area, beyond those disclosed in the Randolph Management Framework Plan (1980) and the Isolated Track Planning Analysis (1985), both as amended by the Bear River East Plan Amendment (Oil and Gas Leasing, 1994) and the BLM’s Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan Amendments for the Great Basin Region (Greater Sage-Grouse, 2015). Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (“EIS”) is not required for the lease sale. My determination is based upon the context and intensity of the lease sale, as described below.

Context

The seven (7) parcels collectively encompass approximately 6,515.09 acres within the SLFO, including 640.00 acres of Federally-managed land and 5,875.09 acres of split-estate land that occur within SLFO that by themselves do not have international, national, regional or state-wide importance.¹

Intensity

The following discussion addresses the 10 significance criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27 for evaluating intensity (the severity of the effect).

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The lease sale would impact resources as described in the EA. There are no potential environmental effects for the lease sale that were not considered in the supporting NEPA documents that are considered to be significant, as defined by 40 C.F.R. §1508.27. Adequate mitigation measures have been applied to the parcels, which include protective stipulations and notices to reduce the potential impacts from future oil and gas operations on other natural resources and uses of the public lands (e.g., no surface occupancy). These mitigation measures are based on the analyses and decisions identified through the supporting NEPA documents and the EA.

¹ Subsequent to the development of the EA, the BLM removed Section 34 in Parcel 372 from consideration under the proposed action, as it was determined that this section could not be leased competitively under the Mineral Leasing Act, due to the terms of the right-of-way that overlays the section (43 CFR 3109). The acreages in the body of the EA have not been updated, nor have the maps. Appendix A has been updated accordingly. As the change in acreage is relatively minor, and includes less land than in the current analysis, the BLM has determined that this change does not affect the description of the affected environment or the environmental impacts of the proposed action.

Before any operations may be authorized, additional and site-specific analysis in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”) and the application of further mitigation (if warranted and as is consistent with the standard lease terms and lease notices and stipulations attached to the lease parcels) to reduce impacts to the environment and other uses of the public lands will be required through the Application for Permit to Drill (“APD”) or Right-of-Way processes.

Should all of the lease parcels be developed, they may contribute substantially to local, regional and national energy supplies.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

Leasing for oil and gas and the subsequent exploration and development is an on-going activity on the public lands. The standard lease terms, which are contained on the lease form (BLM Form 3100-11), the stipulations and notices attached to the leases along with the additional NEPA analysis and potential protections/mitigation at the APD stage, ensure that development of the lease parcels would occur in a way that protects public health and safety. For example, spill prevention plans would be required and any drilling operations would be conducted in accordance with the safety requirements of 43 C.F.R. Subpart 3160, the Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Orders (“Onshore Orders”), best management practices recommended by the American Petroleum Institute, and other industry requirements for the protection of worker safety and public health.

Environmentally responsible oil and gas operations, including those related to public health and safety, are discussed in the EA. All operations, including well pad and road construction, water handling and plugging and abandonment, would be conducted in accordance with The Gold Book: Surface Operating Standards and Guidelines for Oil and Gas Exploration and Development (United States Department of the Interior and United States Department of Agriculture, 2007) (“The Gold Book”). The Gold Book provides operators with a combination of guidance and standard procedures for ensuring compliance with agency policies and operating requirements, such as those found in 43 C.F.R. Subpart 3160, the Onshore Orders and notices to lessees. Also included in The Gold Book are environmental best management practices; these measures are designed to provide for safe and efficient operations while minimizing undesirable impacts to the environment.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The interdisciplinary team that identified the issues analyzed in the EA reviewed the proximity of the proposed lease parcels to historic and cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers and ecologically critical areas. None were near prime farmlands or ecologically critical areas. Those that were near enough to park lands to potentially affect them were reviewed and it was determined impacts from development could be mitigated so as to not impact the park lands. The parcels may encompass historic or cultural resources or wetlands, but those resources are not expected to be of such high density that their protection would not preclude development of the leases. The BLM’s consideration during the lease parcel review process and the coverage in the EA regarding historic and cultural resources for the geographic areas potentially impacted by the Lease Sale are summarized in this document in the response to criterion 8 below.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be controversial.

The oil and gas exploration and development that could follow leasing of the lease parcels is a common practice on public lands. The nature of the activities and the resulting impacts are understood and have been analyzed and disclosed to the public through supporting NEPA documents, including this EA.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

As stated above, leasing and the associated exploration and development of oil and gas resources is not unique or unusual in this area. The BLM has experience implementing the oil and gas program, and the environmental effects to the human environment are adequately analyzed in supporting NEPA documents, including this EA. There are no predicted effects on the human environment that are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks within the project area for the Lease Sale.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

Reasonably foreseeable actions connected to the decision to lease the parcels have been considered. A lessee's right to explore and drill for oil and gas, at some location on a lease, subject to the standard lease terms and specific lease notices and stipulations attached to the lease, is a conspicuous aspect of lease issuance. A lessee must submit to the BLM an APD identifying the specific location and plans for use of the surface and the BLM must approve an APD before any surface disturbance, including drilling, may commence on a lease. The BLM's review of an APD will include site-specific environmental analysis and documentation in accordance with NEPA. If the BLM approves an APD, a lessee may produce oil and/or gas from the lease without additional approval so long as such production is consistent with the terms of the BLM-approved APD. During the lease parcel review process, the impacts that could result from leasing and the subsequent development of oil and/or gas resources from the lease parcels was considered by interdisciplinary teams of resource specialists from the SLFO within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. As stated previously and below, significant impacts, including direct, indirect and cumulative impacts, to other resources and land uses are not expected.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

During the lease parcel review process, the BLM assembled an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists (from the SLFO and the Utah State Office) in order to evaluate the potential environmental impacts that could result from leasing of the parcels. The interdisciplinary team evaluated the potential direct, indirect or cumulative environmental impacts within the context of those disclosed in the chosen alternatives supporting NEPA documents and the EA (EA at Sections 4.1 through 4.4.4.2). With respect to those resources and uses that the BLM identified as potentially impacted by the Lease Sale beyond what was disclosed in the supporting NEPA documents, and for which detailed analysis was afforded in the EA, past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions were considered. The environmental analyses that were conducted by the team and documented in the EA do not predict significant cumulative impacts either beyond

those disclosed in the supporting NEPA documents or, if the issue was not analyzed in the supporting NEPA documents, no significant cumulative impacts are predicted to occur from the incremental addition of the impacts from leasing of the parcels to past, present and reasonably foreseeable relevant actions.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

The Lease Sale is not predicted to adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects that are listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (“National Register”), nor is it anticipated to cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

In order to identify and assess the potential impacts that the Lease Sale might have on cultural resources, including historic properties that are listed or eligible for listing on the National Register pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act (“NHPA”), 16 U.S.C. §§ 470 et seq., the BLM’s cultural resources specialists reviewed and analyzed existing records for cultural resources within the areas of potential effects (“APE”) for the Lease Sale. These cultural resource records reviews and analyses, which are referred to as “Class I” reviews, show cultural site densities that, when considered along with the protective measures applicable to each of the lease parcels (i.e. standard lease terms, lease notices and stipulations), support the EA’s analysis that the issuance and subsequent development of the lease parcels may occur without having significant adverse impacts upon cultural resources. Moreover, with respect to those cultural resources eligible for protection under the NHPA in particular, in accordance with section 106 of the NHPA, 16 U.S.C. § 470f, and its implementing regulations at 36 C.F.R. Part 800, the BLM has determined that the Lease Sale will have a “No Adverse Effects” determination on historic properties. Concurrence from the State Historic Preservation Office was received on October 25, 2018.

For the purposes of soliciting additional information and to request to consult regarding the presence of and potential impacts to cultural resources, including historic properties listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register within the APE, the BLM sent letters to the State of Utah’s State Historic Preservation Office (“SHPO”) and potentially interested Native American Tribes, which provided those parties with notice and the documentation supporting the BLM’s determination as to the potential impacts of the Lease Sale on cultural resources (EA at Section 5.2 and 5.3).

Additionally, pursuant to BLM Handbook 3120-1 – Competitive Leases (P) (H-3120), the following stipulation is attached to all of the lease parcels:

This lease may be found to contain historic properties and/or resources protected under the National Historic Preservation Act, American Indian Religious Freedom Act, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, E.O. 13007, or other statutes and executive orders. The BLM will not approve any ground disturbing activities that may affect any such properties or resources until it completes its obligations under applicable requirements of the NHPA and other authorities. The BLM may require modification to exploration or development proposals to protect such properties, or disapprove any activity that is likely to result in adverse effects that cannot be successfully avoided, minimized or mitigated. (H-3120 at 35).

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973.

As determined during the lease parcel review process and as documented in the EA and the administrative record, leasing of the parcels is not likely to adversely affect any species, or the critical habitat of any species, listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (hereafter “ESA”), 16 U.S.C. §§ 1531 et seq., nor is the project likely to adversely affect any species, or the habitat of any species, that is proposed or a candidate for listing as threatened or endangered under the ESA. Leasing of the parcels is also not expected to have an adverse impact on any species listed on the BLM’s Sensitive Species list, including those species that are neither listed nor proposed/candidates for listing under the ESA.

The BLM has committed to attach the lease notices that it developed through the aforementioned consultation with the USFWS to the appropriate oil and gas leases at the time of issuance, which will serve to notify oil and gas lessees of the specific ESA-protected species or habitat present or potentially present on the subject lease parcels and the associated surface protection requirements that may be imposed pursuant to the ESA or other related laws, regulations or policies.

Additionally, pursuant to BLM Handbook 3120-1 – Competitive Leases (P) (H-3120), the following stipulation is attached to all of the lease parcels:

The lease may now and hereafter contain plants, animals, and their habitats determined to be threatened, endangered, or other special status species. BLM may recommend modifications to exploration and development proposals to further its conservation and management objectives to avoid BLM approved activity that will contribute to a need to list such a species or their habitat. BLM may require modification to or disapprove a proposed activity that is likely to result in jeopardy to the continued existence of a proposed or listed threatened or endangered species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of a designated or proposed critical habitat. BLM will not approve any ground-disturbing activity that may affect any such species or critical habitat until it completes its obligation under requirements of the Endangered Species Act, as amended, 16 U. S. C. § 1531 et seq., including completion of any required procedure for conference or consultation.

The BLM also coordinated with the USFWS and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (“UDWR”) during the lease parcel review process for the specific purpose of identifying and evaluating the potential impacts that the lease sale might have on plant and animal species, including those species that have been listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA, species that are proposed or candidates for ESA protection, and BLM Sensitive Species that are neither listed, proposed nor candidates for protection under the ESA. As a part of this coordination during the lease parcel review process, the BLM consulted with the FWS in order to identify the presence or potential presence of ESA listed, proposed or candidate species and their habitat within the lease parcels to make determinations as to which of the protective measures available, such as lease stipulations and notices, to attach to each of the lease parcels. The BLM also consulted with the USFWS and the UDWR regarding the adequacy of the protections afforded by the stipulations and lease notices available for attachment to the lease parcels.

Based on the aforementioned coordination and consultation with the USFWS and the UDWR, the BLM determined that the reasonably foreseeable impacts from leasing of the parcels to animal and plant species that have been listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA, animal and plant species that are candidates or proposed for listing under the ESA, as well as

BLM Sensitive Species that are neither listed, proposed nor candidates for listing under the ESA, would either be completely avoided or reduced to insignificant levels by the protective measures that were attached to the lease parcels.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The Lease Sale is not predicted to violate any known federal, state, local or tribal law or any other requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. Potentially interested state, local, and tribal interests were given the opportunity to participate in the lease parcel review process.

The March 2019 Lease Sale is in conformance with the applicable land use plans (EA at Section 1.4), in compliance with laws and regulations and consistent with policies (EA at Section 1.5 and Appendix G). Additional consultation, coordination and environmental analysis will be required during the review and consideration for approval of any site specific proposals for oil and gas exploration, drilling or development proposed on the March 2019 Lease Sale parcels.

Signed

-unsigned-

Kent Hoffman
Deputy State Director
Lands and Minerals

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Date