

Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

DOI-BLM-CO-F020-2015-0004 EA

Based on review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects from any alternative assessed or evaluated meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined by 43 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below:

RATIONALE:

Context: The BLM has received one Application for Permit to Drill (APD) proposing the construction of one well pad and access road, and the drilling of one vertical oil well on private surface over federal minerals (split estate).

The projects are in Weld County, approximately 12 miles east of the Town of Ault, Colorado. The federal mineral estate is leased and subject to oil and gas development.

The general area description would be defined as rural rangeland located in the northeastern plains of Colorado, used primarily for livestock production and oil and gas development. There are a few county roads in the project area.

There is no public land or public roads or other public access in the project area.

Extensive oil and gas development has occurred in the area, mostly on private (fee) surface and private (fee) mineral estate.

Intensity:

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the proposed Tigertail Federal 2-3 APD project. Project decision relative to each of the areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

Impacts that may be beneficial and adverse:

There would be minor impacts to air quality from the proposed project. Most of this would occur during the drilling phase. Potential impacts might occur to ground water; however such impacts should not occur if strict drilling requirements are followed. Other minor impacts might occur to wildlife and migratory birds but would be mitigated through the use of timing stipulations. Positive impacts include benefits in royalties and revenue generated to the federal government from productive wells. Other indirect effects could include effects due to overall employment opportunities related to the oil and gas and service support industry in the region as well as the economic benefits to

state and county governments related to royalty payments and severance taxes. Other beneficial impacts from the action would be the potential for productive wells being created that would add, albeit in a small way to national energy independence.

Public health and safety:

The proposed action will have a temporary negative impact to air quality through the generation of fugitive dust during the construction phase. Utilization of the road, surface disturbance, and construction activities such as drilling, well completion, and equipment installation will all impact air quality through the generation of dust related to travel, transport, and general construction. This phase will also produce short term emissions of criteria, hazardous, and greenhouse gas pollutants from vehicle and construction equipment exhausts. Once construction is complete the daily activities at the site will be reduced to operational and maintenance checks which may be as frequent as a daily visit. Emissions will result from vehicle exhausts from the maintenance and process technician visits. The pad can be expected to produce fugitive emissions of well gas, which contains mostly methane and a minor fraction of volatile organic compounds. Fugitive emissions may also result from pressure relief valves and working and breathing losses from any tanks located at the site, as well as any flanges, seals, valves, other infrastructure connections used at the site. Liquid product load-out operations will also generate fugitive emissions of VOCs and vehicular emissions. If the operator is unable to sell any produced gas from the well, then gas flaring will also produce emissions of criteria, HAP, and GHG emissions.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area:

The EA evaluated the area of the proposed action and determined that no unique geographic characteristics such as: wild and scenic rivers, prime or unique farmlands, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, designated wilderness areas, wilderness study areas or Lands with Wilderness Characteristics; were present.

Degree to which effects are likely to be highly controversial:

The potential for controversy associated with the effects of the proposed action is low. There is no disagreement or controversy among ID team members or reviewers over the nature of the effects on the resource values on public land by the proposed action.

Degree to which effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:

The drilling of oil and gas wells has occurred historically over the past century and although the potential risks involved can be controversial, they are neither unique nor unknown. There is low potential of unknown or unique risks associated with this project due to numerous other well locations having been successfully drilled in this area of Weld County.

Consideration of whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts:

The proposed APDs will be limited to standard construction procedures associated with pad/road construction and drilling in Weld County and have occurred historically on split

and private mineral estate. There are no aspects of the current proposal that are precedent setting.

Consideration of whether the action is related to other actions with cumulatively significant impacts:

The action is a continuation of oil and gas activities that have historically occurred in the area. Continued oil and gas activity in the area will have minor but additive impacts to air and the production greenhouse gas emissions. The project area having been subject to historic drilling activity will continue to experience gradual depletion of the recoverable oil and gas products. Although past cattle grazing had contributed to cumulative impacts, there have been no other recent activities besides oil and gas that has contributed to cumulative impacts.

Scientific, cultural or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places:

No historic properties were recorded during the cultural resources inventories.

Threatened and endangered species and their critical habitat:

There are no known populations of T&E species in the action area, however the proposed action may have an indirect impact on federally-listed species in Nebraska by potentially resulting in new depletions to the South Platte River. This could affect habitat for the western prairie fringed orchid, whooping crane, interior least tern, northern Great Plains population of the piping plover, pallid sturgeon (collectively referred to as the target species), and designated critical habitat of the whooping crane.

Due to the potential depletions to the South Platte River, this project falls under BLM Colorado's Programmatic Biological Assessment (PBA) for water depleting activities associated with BLM's fluid minerals program in the Platte River basin in Colorado (BLM 2015).

In response to BLM's PBA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) issued a Programmatic Biological Opinion (PBO)(06E-24000-2014-F-0671) on February 2, 2015, which concurred with BLM's determination that water depletions are "Likely to Adversely Affect" the whooping crane, interior least tern, northern Great Plains population of the piping plover, pallid sturgeon (collectively referred to as the target species), and designated critical habitat of the whooping crane. However, the FWS also determined that BLM water depletions from the Platte River Basin are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the whooping crane, interior least tern, northern Great Plains population of the piping plover, and the pallid sturgeon, and that BLM water depletions are not likely to destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat for the whooping crane.

The Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP), is implementing actions designed to assist in the conservation and recovery of the target species and their associated habitats along the central and lower Platte River in Nebraska through a basin-wide cooperative approach agreed to by the States of Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming

and the U.S. Department of the Interior. The PRRIP addresses the adverse impacts of existing and certain new water related activities on the Platte target species and associated habitats, and provides ESA compliance for effects to the target species and whooping crane critical habitat from such activities including avoidance of any prohibited take of such species. The PRRIP serves as the reasonable and prudent alternative to offset the effects of water related activities that FWS found were likely to cause jeopardy to one or more of the target species or to adversely modify critical habitat.

The PBO addresses water depletions associated with fluid minerals development on BLM lands, including water used for well drilling and completion, hydrostatic testing of pipelines, dust abatement on roads, and seismic activity. The PBO includes reasonable and prudent alternatives developed by the FWS which allow BLM to authorize oil and gas wells that result in water depletion while avoiding the likelihood of jeopardizing endangered species and avoiding destruction or adverse modification of their critical habitat. The PBO confirms ESA compliance for water-related activities of oil and gas producers that elect to rely on the PRRIP through maintaining membership in good standing in the South Platte Water Related Activities Program, Inc. (SPWRAP) organization.

The SPWRAP organization is formally charged with certifying to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that water users in Colorado are meeting the requirements to support reliance on the PRRIP for ESA compliance purposes.

Grynberg Petroleum has provided proof of current membership in SPWRAP and therefore is considered to be in compliance with the ESA as to the depletive effects of their activities on federally listed species and designated critical habitat associated with the Platte River in Nebraska.

Any effects that threaten a violation of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment: The proposed action conforms with the provisions of NEPA (U.S.C. 4321-4346) and FLPMA (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) and is compliant with the Clean Water Act and The Clean Air Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Endangered Species Act.

NAME OF PREPARER: Aaron Richter

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NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: Martin Weimer

DATE: 5/6/2015

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

Keith E. Berger, Field Manager

DATE SIGNED:

