

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
220 E Market St
Meeker, CO 81641

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

Natural Soda LLC, Resource Definition Drill Holes 2016 **DOI-BLM-CO-N05-2016-0067-CX**

Identifying Information

Project Title: Natural Soda LLC, Resource Definition Drill Holes 2016

Legal Description: Sixth Principal Meridian
T. 1 S., R. 98 W.
Section 35 Lot 1

Applicant: Natural Soda LLC (NS)

Casefile/Project Number: COC119986-01
COC77816 (Off-lease access road ROW)

Issues and Concerns

Portion of proposed access is off lease.

Conformance with the Land Use Plan

The Proposed Action is subject to and is in conformance (43 CFR 1610.5) with the following land use plan:

Land Use Plan: White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (1997 White River RMP)

Date Approved: July 1997

Decision Language: "Facilitate the orderly and environmentally sound development of sodium resources occurring on public lands." (Pages 2-6 and 2-7)

Proposed Action

Project Components and General Schedule

Background/Introduction: NS operates an in-situ sodium bicarbonate (nahcolite) solution mining operation and has been in continual operations since 1991. Their operation and facilities are located at the termination of Rio Blanco County (RBC) Road 31 (Figures 1 and 2) in the

hole if needed. NS would make every effort to utilize the existing pad without creating additional disturbance and does not intend to disturb the entire 1.5 acres. Access would have a 12 foot travel width and could disturb up to 25 feet. Total access length could be up to 3,000 feet. Due to the temporary nature of the locations only native material would be used to construct necessary access. Access roads would be designed to reduce disturbance of forested areas and existing drainages. Access roads would be cut at the edge of forested areas whenever possible to minimize tree damage and disturbance. Table 1 below summarizes anticipated surface disturbance.

Table 1 List of Proposed NS Resource Holes

Well	Permitted Area (acres)	Minimum Anticipated Pad Surface Disturbance within the Permitted Area (acres)		Maximum Anticipated Pad Surface Disturbance within the Permitted Area (acres)		Potential Monitoring Well (3 Estimated)	Access Road Length (feet)	Access Road (acres)		Existing Access
		Short term	Long term	Short term	Long term			(Based on 25 feet)	(Based on 12 feet)	
Drill Hole		Short term	Long term	Short term	Long term			Short Term	Long Term	
RDP-1	1.5	0.5	0.25	1.5	0.25	Unknown	520	0.30	0.15	New
RDP-2	1.5	0.5	0.25	1.5	0.25	Unknown	270	0.15	0.08	New
RDP-3	1.5	0.5	0.25	1.5	0.25	Unknown	280	0.16	0.08	New
RDP-4	1.5	0.5	0.25	1.5	0.25	Unknown	340	0.20	0.10	New
RDP-5	1.5	0.5	0.25	1.5	0.25	Unknown	260	0.15	0.07	New
RDP-6	1.5	0.5	0.25	1.5	0.25	Unknown	320	0.18	0.09	New
RDP-7	1.5	0.5	0.25	1.5	0.25	Unknown	80	0.05	0.03	New
RDP-8	1.5	0.5	0.25	1.5	0.25	Unknown	160	0.09	0.04	New
RDP-9	1.5	0.5	0.25	1.5	0.25	Unknown	100	0.06	0.03	New
RDP-10	1.5	0.5	0.25	1.5	0.25	Unknown	690	0.40	0.20	New
Total	15	3.0 ¹	0.8 ^{2,4}	9.0 ³	0.8 ^{2,4}	3 (Est.)	3,020	1.7 ⁴	0.9 ⁴	

¹Based on six locations utilizing 0.5 acres.

²Based on the conversion of three holes to monitoring wells.

³Based on six locations of utilizing the entire 1.5 acre area.

⁴Rounded

NS would likely begin construction activity for drilling as soon as possible in 2016 and could be completed in three months for construction of all the wells, or extend over a three year period dependent on NS's drilling budget. Each hole is expected to require approximately 10 days to construct and drill. Timing could vary if difficulties are encountered. Any subsequent hole drilled within the pad location area could add 7 to 10 additional days.

If 6 of the 10 locations and access roads are used, the total maximum estimated short term disturbance would be approximately 10.7 acres (9.0 acres for well pads and 1.7 acres for access; Table 1). However, it is highly unlikely the maximum amount of surface disturbance would occur and actual short term disturbance would be somewhere between the minimum surface

5. If any paleontological resources are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, NS or any of his agents must stop work immediately at that site, immediately contact the BLM Paleontology Coordinator, and make every effort to protect the site from further impacts, including looting, erosion, or other human or natural damage. Work may not resume at that location until approved by the AO. The BLM or designated paleontologist will evaluate the discovery and take action to protect or remove the resource within 10 working days. Within 10 days, the operator will be allowed to continue construction through the site, or will be given the choice of either (a) following the Paleontology Coordinator’s instructions for stabilizing the fossil resource in place and avoiding further disturbance to the fossil resource, or (b) following the Paleontology Coordinator’s instructions for mitigating impacts to the fossil resource prior to continuing construction through the project area.

Categorical Exclusion Review

The Proposed Action qualifies as a categorical exclusion under 516 DM 11.9, Number F-8: *“Approval of minor modifications to or minor variances from activities described in an approved underground or surface mine plan for leasable minerals (e.g., change in mining sequence or timing).”*

The Proposed Action has been reviewed with the list of extraordinary circumstances (43 CFR 46.215) described in the table below.

Extraordinary Circumstance	YES	NO
a) Have significant adverse effects on public health and safety.		X
b) Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands; floodplains; national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.		X
c) Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.		X
d) Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		X
e) Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		X
f) Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		X
g) Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places as determined by the bureau.		X
h) Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have adverse effects on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		X
i) Violate a Federal law, or a State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		X
j) Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations.		X
k) Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly affect the physical integrity of such		X

community. These sites are rooted in the community's history and are important in maintaining cultural identity. Locations of TCPs, are often not known to the BLM, but may be present in or near the project area due its location in the Piceance Basin. Should recommended inventories or future consultations with Tribal authorities reveal the existence of such sensitive properties, appropriate mitigation and/or protection measures may be undertaken.

Threatened and Endangered Wildlife Species: There are no threatened or endangered animal species that are known to inhabit or derive important use from the project area. Lower elevation big sagebrush and pinyon juniper woodlands encompassing the project area are classified by Colorado Parks and Wildlife as mule deer severe winter range, a specialized component of winter range that supports virtually an entire herds population during the most severe winters (heavy snow, extreme temperatures). These ranges receive heaviest use from January through late-April.

Threatened and Endangered Plant Species: The area of the Proposed Action has been covered by multiple plant surveys. Based on surveys completed in 2014, there are no special status plants or plant habitat in the vicinity of the Proposed Action. There will be no direct or indirect impacts to special status plants from the Proposed Action.

Mitigation

1. Activities (construction, drilling etc.) associated with the Proposed Action will be conducted outside of the big game critical winter period of December 1 – April 30. Construction activities will be allowed from May 1 – November 30.

Tribes, Individuals, Organizations, or Agencies Consulted

None.

Compliance with NEPA

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 11.9, F-8. This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The Proposed Action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 43 CFR 46.215 apply.

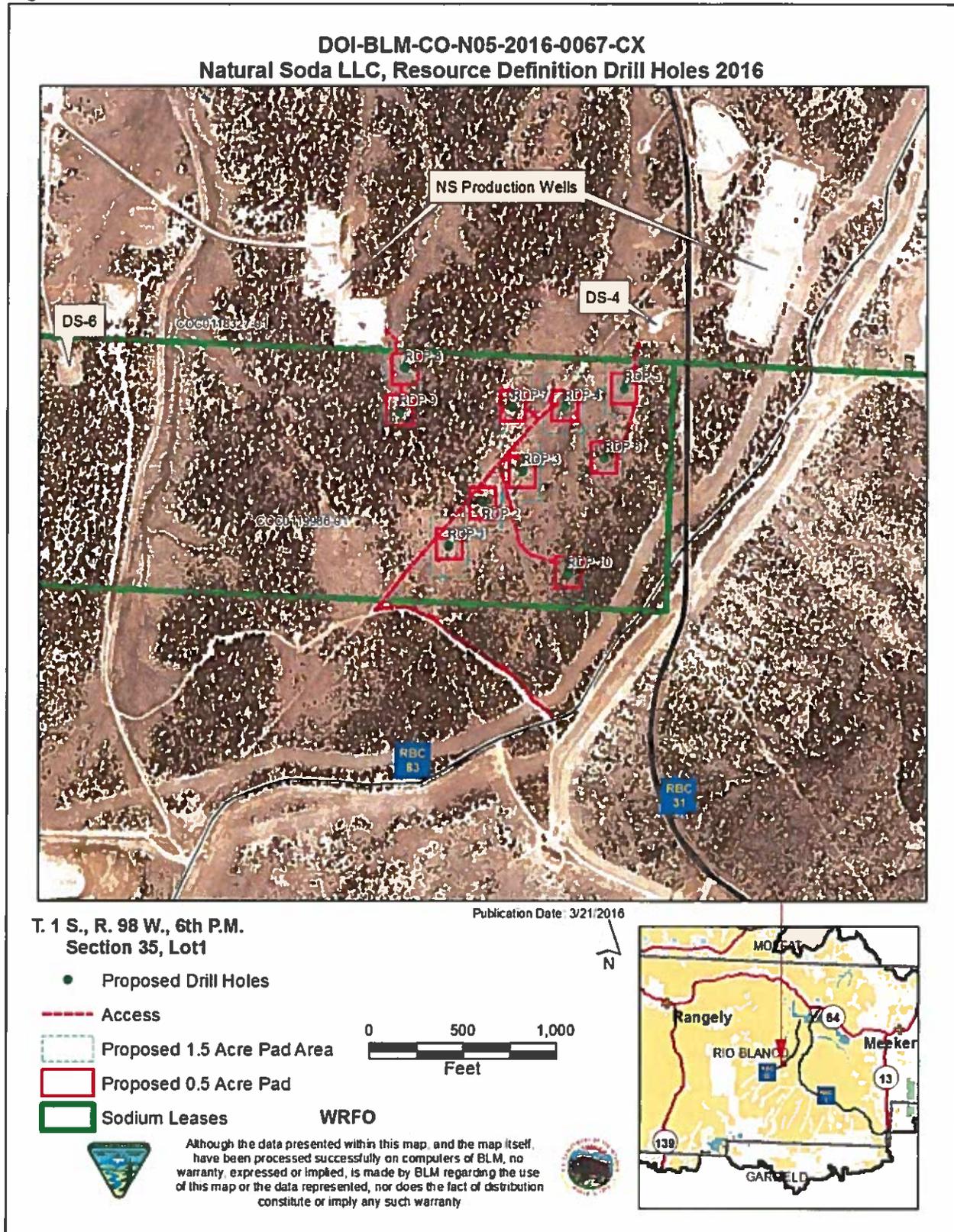


Field Manager



Date

Figure 2



operator must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the AO.

5. NS is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for disturbing or collecting vertebrate or other scientifically-important fossils, collecting large amounts of petrified wood (over 25lbs./day, up to 250lbs./year), or collecting fossils for commercial purposes on public lands.
6. If any paleontological resources are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, NS or any of his agents must stop work immediately at that site, immediately contact the BLM Paleontology Coordinator, and make every effort to protect the site from further impacts, including looting, erosion, or other human or natural damage. Work may not resume at that location until approved by the AO. The BLM or designated paleontologist will evaluate the discovery and take action to protect or remove the resource within 10 working days. Within 10 days, the operator will be allowed to continue construction through the site, or will be given the choice of either (a) following the Paleontology Coordinator's instructions for stabilizing the fossil resource in place and avoiding further disturbance to the fossil resource, or (b) following the Paleontology Coordinator's instructions for mitigating impacts to the fossil resource prior to continuing construction through the project area.
7. Activities (construction, drilling etc.) associated with the Proposed Action will be conducted outside of the big game critical winter period of December 1 – April 30. Construction activities will be allowed from May 1 – November 30.

Compliance with Laws & Conformance with the Land Use Plan

This decision is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act and the National Historic Preservation Act. It is also in conformance with the 1997 White River Record of Decision/Approved Resource Management Plan.

Public Involvement

This project was posted on the WRFO's on-line National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) register on 1/26/2016. No comments or inquiries have been received as of 3/23/2016.

Rationale

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 11.9, F-8. This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The Proposed Action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 43 CFR 46.215 apply.

Resource definition drilling would provide geotechnical data that would help NS maximize the economic recovery of the sodium resources within their federal sodium lease with the least amount of surface disturbance.