

**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
BAKERSFIELD FIELD OFFICE**

**Environmental Assessment
Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)**

**Atwell Island Extensive Recreation Management Area
Orphan Well Abandonment
DOI-BLM-CA-C060-2016-0053-EA**

BACKGROUND

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to conduct well abandonments for five (5) orphaned gas wells within the Trico Gas Field: Anderson Unit 1 #1-12, Anderson Unit 2 #2-12, Tidewater Associated Fee #2, Tidewater Associated Fee #3, and Guy 1. These wells are located on BLM managed lands within the Atwell Island Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA); BLM does not maintain subsurface mineral rights within the project footprint. The Atwell Island ERMA can be accessed using Road 38 in Alpaugh, California. California Department of Conservation, Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources (CDOGGR) would serve as contractors for this project and would oversee downhole plug and abandonment activity as well as basic re-contouring of each well location. All ancillary facilities including separators, meters, concrete slabs, and wooden well cellar covers would be removed from site and all underground piping would be capped and abandoned in place.

The purpose of the proposed action is to contract CDOGGR to conduct orphaned gas well abandonments within the Atwell Island ERMA and a portion of the Sand Ridge Unit of the Ancient Lake Shores Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The need for the proposed action is to meet ERMA, ACEC and biological goals, objectives, and decisions committed to in the 2014 Bakersfield Field Office Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. The EA discloses the analysis of the environmental consequences that are anticipated from the abandonment of 5 orphaned gas wells and ancillary facilities within the Atwell Island ERMA and the Sand Ridge Unit of the Ancient Lake Shores ACEC. The EA is incorporated in this FONSI by reference.

Finding of No Significant Impact

On the basis of the information contained in the EA, and all other information available to me, it is my determination that: (1) the implementation of the Proposed Action will not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in the Bakersfield Resource Management Plan, approved in December 2014; (2) the Proposed Action is in conformance with the Resource Management Plan; and (3) the Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement or a supplement to the existing environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared. This finding is based on the following discussion:

Context: The proposed project is located on the Atwell Island ERMA and the Sand Ridge Unit of the Ancient Lakeshores ACEC, which can be accessed from Alpaugh, California. The proposed project area is surrounded by retired and current agricultural lands as well as restored wetlands. The discretionary action is to contract CDOGGR to conduct well abandonments on five orphaned gas wells.

The proposed activity is a site-specific action with minor localized effects on air quality and soil disturbance in the immediate area. The EA details the effects of the action alternatives. None of the effects identified, including cumulative effects, are considered to be significant and do not exceed those effects described in the Resource Management Plan.

Intensity: I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the proposed action for the five well abandonments. The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27. The discussions below apply to all project elements contained within the EA:

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse and a significant effect may exist regardless of the perceived balance of effects. Potential adverse impacts include the emission of air pollutants and the degradation of soil resources. However, none of these impacts would be significant at the local scale or cumulatively because of the small scale of the project and design features that would reduce impacts to immeasurable levels. The air emissions are below *de minimis* levels and soil resources will be preserved and restored to the extent possible following project implementation. Beneficial impacts from the abandonment of the wells and removal of the associated equipment and facilities would be the restoration of the well sites to upland habitat.

2. The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety. The proposed project is comparable to other similar activities and projects already undertaken on BLM-administered lands within the Bakersfield Field Office and nationwide with no unusual health or safety concerns. Abandonment operations in California are subject to State (CDOGGR) and local standards and regulations. Implementation of measures to meet these standards and regulations will minimize risks to public health and safety; therefore, any impacts to public health and safety are not considered significant. In addition, there will be beneficial impacts to public health or safety by removing orphaned equipment and facilities within the recreation area.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. No park lands, wetlands or wild and scenic rivers would be adversely affected by the proposed development. This project falls within the Sand Ridge Unit of the Ancient Lakeshores ACEC, but furthers objectives to protect significant cultural resources, maintain rare plant communities, and manage habitat for listed species. The project area has been surveyed and analyzed for biological, historical, paleontological and cultural resources. The project will not significantly affect biological, historical, or cultural resources. Biological resources would not be significantly affected because no special status species or critical habitat exist within the project area. No cultural resources were identified within the area of potential effect.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial. It is highly unlikely that any portion of the analyzed action would be controversial.

Similar actions are commonplace in the area and draw little controversy. Well abandonments have occurred within the Trico Gas Field consistently for many years.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. The proposed project is not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience implementing similar projects in similar areas and have found effects to be reasonably predictable. The effects to the human environment are fully analyzed in the EA. There are no predicted effects on the human environment which are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

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. The proposed project does not set a precedent for future actions that may have significant effects. The proposed project is limited to the abandonment of five orphan gas wells, removal of ancillary facilities, and cap and abandonment of underground piping in place. Any future proposals submitted within the project area would be considered independently and be subject to site specific NEPA analysis and documentation.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. The project is consistent with the actions and impacts anticipated in the Bakersfield RMP. No significant cumulative effects have been identified. A complete disclosure of the effects of the proposed action and no action alternative is contained in the EA.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. A cultural resource inventory was conducted for the Area of Potential Effect (APE) for the proposed action (BLM CRIR# 6000-2016-19). Cultural Resources consisting of the miscellaneous gas field equipment proposed for removal are within the project APE. These features were formally evaluated for National Register of Historic Places eligibility and determined to be ineligible due to a lack of integrity. Therefore they do not constitute historic properties as defined by the National Historic Preservation Act. As a result there will be no adverse effect to districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and there will be no loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its designated critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The proposed action is not expected to have significant impacts to listed species or critical habitat because no listed species or designated critical habitat exists within the project area.

10. Whether the action threatens to violate; Federal, State, or local law or requirements for the protection of the environment. This action would not violate federal, state, or local laws or requirements. The proposed action is fully consistent with the 2014 Bakersfield Resource Management Plan. The EA is in full compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended. The proposed action will not result in undue or unnecessary resource degradation.

Prepared by: /s/Tiera Arbogast
Project Lead

19 April 2016
Date

Approved by: /s/John Hodge
Assistant Field Manager-Minerals

4/25/16
Date