

U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management

Finding of No Significant Impact

Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-UT-0000-2016-0002EA
(Utah 2016 Geothermal Lease Sale)

October 2016

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Utah State Office
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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT DETERMINATION

Based upon a review of the September 2016 EA and supporting documents, I have determined that the project is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity (40 CFR 1508.27), as described below. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed.

Context

The Proposed Action is a site-specific action directly involving approximately 18,817.8 acres of BLM- and USFS-administered land; the action by itself does not have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance. The Proposed Action is limited in scope and duration, consisting of the approval of geothermal lease nominations for eight parcels. Geothermal leasing is consistent with multiple use management requirements on public lands under FLPMA, with the Secretary of Interior's goal to approve electricity from non-hydropower renewable energy projects on public lands, and with Secretarial Order 3285A1 that establishes the development of environmentally responsible renewable energy as a priority for the U.S. Department of the Interior. The Proposed Action is also consistent with the Geothermal PEIS and Geothermal ROD, and with BLM and USFS land use management plans. Overall, the anticipated surface disturbance associated with proposed geothermal development in each of the eight lease parcels is low (ranging from 65 to 374 acres), and the implementation of lease stipulations and BMPs will minimize impacts.

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.

Exploration and development of the geothermal leases could impact resources including cultural resources and Native American religious concerns, wildlife, recreation, soils, special status animal species, migratory birds, water resources, USFS inventoried roadless areas, and wetlands, riparian zones, and floodplains. Protective lease stipulations and BMPs to reduce impacts to these resources are incorporated into the Proposed Action.

Geothermal resource exploration and production on the parcels would be conducted through leases with the BLM and would be subject to stipulations, lease notices, and BMPs. Before any surface-disturbing operations are authorized on any of the lease parcels, additional site-specific analysis would be required in accordance with NEPA.

If geothermal resources on all of the lease parcels are developed, they would contribute to local and regional renewable energy supplies. In addition, the construction and development of geothermal resources could have positive impacts to the local economy through the purchase of goods and services.

2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health or safety.

Implementation of the Proposed Action would not affect public health or safety because it is a leasing action. However, the resulting geothermal exploration and development that would likely follow the Proposed Action could affect public health and safety depending on the development scenario. Potential health and safety impacts would be addressed through additional site-specific analysis required by NEPA.

In addition, the BMPs to protect health and safety in Appendix B of the Geothermal ROD would be applied to each lease parcel. For example, the BMPs require the preparation of a hazardous materials management plan and a waste management plan.

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.

Analysis in the EA included a review of the proximity of the lease parcels to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. The lease parcels were not within or near any park lands, prime farmlands, or wild and scenic rivers. The lease parcels may contain historic or cultural resources, wetlands, or ecologically critical areas for birds, however, the integrity of any unique characteristics identified in the eight lease parcels would be protected by lease stipulations, lease notices, and BMPs. Additional information on the analysis of impacts to historic and cultural resources is included in criterion 8 below.

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

Geothermal leasing and the exploration and development that could follow are not unusual on public lands. The activities themselves and the resulting impacts are understood and have been disclosed to the public through the Geothermal PEIS and the EA. There is no scientific controversy over the nature of the impacts. Therefore, the effects of the Proposed Action on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. In addition, no highly controversial or significant issues related to the human environment were identified during scoping efforts (see Appendix C of the EA) or during the analysis process.

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

The Proposed Action is not unique or unusual, and the BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas. The effects to the human environment are fully analyzed and disclosed in the EA. There are no predicted effects on the human environment that are considered highly uncertain or that involve unique or unknown risks.

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

Once leases are issued for the parcels, a lessee has the right to explore and develop geothermal resources at some location on a lease, subject to the standard lease terms and the specific stipulations and BMPs attached to the lease. The BLM's review of an application to explore and/or develop geothermal resources on a lease will include site-specific environmental analysis and documentation in accordance with NEPA.

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

Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions that would affect the analyzed resources are described in Section 4.3 of the EA. Resource-specific cumulative impacts from the Proposed Action are described in Section 4.4 of the EA. The Proposed Action was considered in the context of these past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, and significant cumulative effects are not predicted.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or object listed in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

To assess the Proposed Action's impact on cultural resources listed in the NRHP, a cultural resources literature review (literature review) (SWCA 2016a) was conducted for the eight lease parcels. Of the eight lease parcels, two have been fully surveyed for cultural resources and six have been partially surveyed for cultural resources. In all, 46 recorded sites were identified on the eight lease parcels. One of the recorded sites is listed on the NRHP. Seventeen of the recorded sites are eligible for the NRHP, six of the recorded sites are unevaluated for NRHP eligibility, and 22 of the recorded sites are not eligible for the NRHP. The literature review also provided an estimate of the potential for encountering significant cultural sites on each parcel.

Overall, the anticipated surface disturbance associated with proposed geothermal development in each of the eight lease parcels is low (ranging from 65 to 374 acres, or between 1.3 and 31.8 percent of each parcel). As a result, based on the low to moderate potential for significant archaeological sites across most of the parcels and on the size and configuration of sites, the literature review report recommended that potential lessees could develop geothermal exploration and facilities within each of the eight lease parcels, after site-specific reviews, without adversely affecting properties eligible for the NRHP. The literature review report states that "none of these parcels should be excluded from nomination to the eight-parcel geothermal lease sale" (SWCA 2016a, p.117) and recommends a finding of no adverse effect for each of the eight lease parcels, assuming that the standard and parcel specific stipulations are applied and include Class III surveys on six of the eight parcels. Based on the results of the literature review report, the BLM made a determination of "no adverse effect." The Utah State Historic Preservation Office concurred with this determination on September 27.

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 Endangered Species Act of 1973.

An evaluation of the potential for threatened, endangered, and candidate (TEC) plant and wildlife species to occur in the eight lease parcels was completed for the EA. There are no known TEC species in any of the eight lease parcels. In addition, no critical habitat for TEC species was identified in the lease parcels. Therefore, there would be no significant impacts to federally listed threatened and endangered species because no such species are present. Impacts to other special status species such as big game are analyzed in the EA and would be minimized by lease stipulations and BMPs.

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

The Proposed Action would not violate any federal, state, local, or tribal law or any other requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. Potentially interested state, local, and tribal entities were given the opportunity to participate in the NEPA process, and appropriate agencies were properly notified of the Proposed Action (see Sections 1.7.1 and 5.2 of the EA). The project is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs.

SIGNED

/s/ Kent Hoffman
Kent Hoffman, Deputy State Director, Lands and Minerals
Bureau of Land Management Utah State Office

10/25/16

Date