



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

News Release

Utah State Office

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 24, 2016

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BLM Releases Final Environmental Impact Statement for Monument Butte Oil and Gas Project

VERNAL, Utah — The Bureau of Land Management Vernal Field Office has completed its analysis of the Monument Butte Area Oil and Gas Project and has released a final environmental impact statement (Final EIS) for public review. The Final EIS analyzes the potential impacts of Newfield Exploration Company's proposed infill development project, as well as alternatives to that proposal.

Newfield's proposal encompasses approximately 119,784 acres in an existing oil and gas producing area on BLM-managed land south of Myton, Utah, in Duchesne and Uintah counties. Under the preferred alternative, up to 5,750 new oil and gas wells would be drilled over the next 16 years, including the construction of associated production support facilities.

Because of the scale of this project, the final EIS includes a robust suite of mitigation strategies consistent with Secretarial Order No. 3330 (*"Improving Mitigation Policies and Practices of the Department of the Interior"*) and the BLM's obligations under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. Mitigation will be a critical component of any final decision on the Project.

"Given the air quality concerns in the Uintah Basin and the potential for a non-attainment designation, protecting air quality was a primary concern as we developed this EIS," said Jenna Whitlock, acting state director for BLM-Utah. "As result, the EIS contains strong measures to control emissions that lead to ozone formation, a major air pollution concern. It also contains extensive mitigation strategies to protect threatened plants, water quality, and soil resources."

An official with the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency echoed the importance of the air quality considerations.

"The EPA is working with state, tribal, and federal partners to improve ozone conditions in the Uinta Basin," said Martin Hestmark, assistant regional administrator for the Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation. "Because ozone events can adversely affect human health, it is particularly important that new projects do not worsen air quality in the basin. BLM has worked collaboratively to propose a creative air quality mitigation strategy for this project to control emissions."

The public review period for the FEIS concludes August 8, 2016 after which the BLM may release a record of decision for this project. The document is available online at the BLM –Vernal Planning website:

<http://go.usa.gov/xqjTJ>.

The preferred alternative would allow for the project while protecting wetlands, precluding most new well pads, minimizing disturbance in areas supporting threatened cactus species and minimizing impacts through use of directional drilling.

The project is estimated to generate about 540-600 million cubic feet of natural gas and about 335 million barrels of oil over the next 20 years. Total employment, including direct, indirect, and induced employment, would peak at about 500 jobs. Approximately \$73.6 million in taxes would be paid to Uintah and Duchesne Counties and about \$138.7 million would be paid to the State. The State and counties and EPA have been actively involved as cooperators throughout the EIS process.

The Final EIS is not a decision document but rather an analysis that considers a range of potential impacts from the project. After the conclusion of the review period, the BLM will release its Record of Decision and determination on how the project will proceed.

Additional information is available from Stephanie Howard at (435)781-4469. Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 to contact the above individual during normal business hours. The FIRS is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to leave a message or question with the above individual. Replies are provided during normal business hours.

The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land, the most of any Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America's public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. In Fiscal Year 2015, the BLM generated \$4.1 billion in receipts from activities occurring on public lands.

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