

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

**Finding of No Significant
Impact**

DOI-BLM-NV-B020-2016-0015-EA

**Application for Permit to Drill
Soda Spring 1-22 Oil Well**

PREPARING OFFICE

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Tonopah, Nevada



Finding of No Significant Impact

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**Application for Permit to Drill
the Soda Spring 1-22 Oil Well**

Table of Contents

Finding of No Significant Impact	1
Application for Permit to Drill the Soda Spring 1-22 Oil Well	1
Context.....	1
Intensity	1
Signature	3

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NEPA DOI-BLM-NV-B020-2016-0015-EA Case Files N-81152 (APD), N-94465 (ROW)

I have reviewed Environmental Assessment (EA) **DOI-BLM-NV-B020-2016-0015-EA** dated September 22, 2016. The EA addresses the Application for Permit to Drill (APD) and an associated application for a right-of-way (ROW) for an existing road to access the proposed well site. After consideration of the environmental effects as described in the EA, and incorporated herein, I have determined that the proposed action identified in the EA will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required to be prepared.

The proposed action is in conformance with the approved Tonopah Resource Management Plan, and is consistent with applicable plans and policies of county, state, tribal and Federal agencies. This finding and conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context

The proposed exploratory oil well would involve a maximum of 500 x 500 feet (5.7) acre disturbance within a sparsely-vegetated 39,983-acre playa soil complex in Railroad Valley. If exploration were to result in production, facilities for production and storage would be allowed without further NEPA analysis if they remained within the same disturbance boundary, assuming no new overriding issues arose. If exploration did not result in production, the well would be sealed and capped with a dry well marker, the site would be recontoured and revegetated. The ROW is for 0.84 mile of an existing raised gravel bed road where it extends from a county road, the Railroad Valley Road / Hanks Road, to the lease boundary. No new access road would need to be constructed to connect the existing gravel road with the Soda Spring well pad, because the existing road and proposed pad site are directly adjacent.

Intensity

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

An interdisciplinary (ID) team considered the project's potential to affect all resources, and analyzed potential effects to flow if water across the playa; soils; vegetation; visual resources; and wildlife, including migratory birds, eagles and BLM Sensitive species. The ID team's analysis determined that all of these effects would be minor. In summary, the project is not within a FEMA-designated floodplain, but the playa is seasonally flooded and the course of floodwaters may be slightly altered by the raised gravel well pad and other facilities. Soil and vegetation disturbance would be limited to the 5.7 acre disturbance boundary, in an area of erodible soils and sparse vegetation. Topsoil would be removed and stored and gravel would protect the erodible soils from erosion during the project; and after completion the gravel would be removed, the site would be recontoured, and stored topsoil would be replaced and reseeded. Visual impacts would be minimized by various requirements (see EA Appendix A) and would be within allowable limits for the Class IV Visual Resource Management objectives prescribed for the area by the

RMP. Effects to wildlife are anticipated to be minor, with no population-level effects. The area of proposed disturbance is small relative to the available surrounding habitat, and does not provide important habitat for any species. The spring from which the proponent intends to pump water may support a population of Railroad Valley tui chub, a special status fish; we worked with Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) to add State recommendations to minimize effects to the fish. See EA Appendix A for Conditions of Approval that would minimize wildlife effects. These include a 25 mph speed limit which will help prevent collisions between project vehicles and wildlife; requirements to avoid work during the nesting seasons for migratory birds or eagles, or survey and avoid nests; fencing and netting requirements for the reserve pit; and screening the pump pipe or hose to minimize intake of fish.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

Public health and safety are not expected to be affected by the Proposed Action. The required Conditions of Approval and SOPs (Appendices A and B) include those considered necessary to ensure human health and safety.

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.

None of these characteristics are present in the project area. A Class III cultural resources survey found one archaeological site; this site is categorically not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and is therefore not a historic property requiring further consideration under the National Historic Preservation Act.

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

There is no known scientific controversy regarding the effects of the Proposed Action, and the effects are not anticipated to be considered controversial by the general public.

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

The Proposed Action does not use new or untested methods or technology, but well-established techniques and standard measures to protect the environment and human safety. The anticipated effects are well known as a result of similar actions in similar environments.

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 action is not new and would not set a precedent. BLM has issued permits to drill two other oil wells within the same playa soil complex, and numerous other such permits in the larger region.

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

Cumulative impacts are analyzed in the EA and found to be minimal for all potentially-affected resources.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

No significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources are present in the project area. See item (3) above.

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 ESA of 1973.

No ESA-listed species or critical habitat occurs within or near the project area.

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 is consistent with all applicable Federal, State and local laws and requirements.

Signature

<p>Signature</p>  <p>Timothy J. Coward Field Manager</p>	<p>Date</p> <p>9/22/2016</p>
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