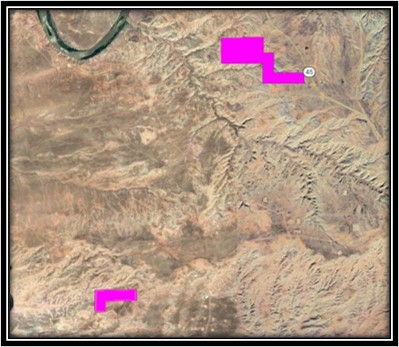
**The December 2024**

**BLM Utah 2025 Second Quarter Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale**

**Finding of No Significant Impact**

**DOI-BLM-UT-0000-2024-0001-EA**

**Uintah County, Utah**

****

**Bureau of Land Management:**

Utah State Office

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Suite 500

Salt Lake City, Utah 84101

The BLM’s multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on public lands.

DOI-BLM-UT-0000-2024-0001-EA

###### Background

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) analyzing the effects of leasing two (2) lease parcels (totaling 833.28 acres) nominated for auction in the BLM Utah Second Quarter 2025 Competitive Oil and Gas Lease Sale (Lease Sale) on public lands managed by the BLM’s Vernal Field Office (VFO).

**Surface ownership**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **County** | **Parcels** | **Surface Management Entity (SME)** | **Acres** |
| Uintah | 7688 | BLM | 201.2 |
| Uintah | 1551 | BLM | 632.08 |

The EA analyzes the Proposed Action (Alternative A) and the No Action Alternative (Alternative B). Under the No Action Alternative, BLM would not offer any parcels for lease and current management would continue. Alternative A (Proposed Action) analyzes the impacts of offering the two nominated lease parcels for competitive leasing, with stipulations and lease notices consistent with the Vernal Resource Management Plan (Vernal RMP). Under the action alternative, the BLM Authorized Officer has the authority to selectively lease parcels or defer leasing, based on the analysis of potential impacts presented in the Lease Sale EA. Surface management, the legal land description of the nominated lease parcels, the lease stipulations and notices attached to the parcels and a descriptive summary of stipulations and lease notices are included in Appendix B of the EA. Twenty-two issues identified during the scoping process (See EA Sections 1.6 and 1.7) are analyzed in brief in EA Section 3.5. Two issues concerning air quality and greenhouse gases and climate change are analyzed in detail in the EA Section 3.6.

###### Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon the review of the analysis in DOI-BLM-UT-0000-2024-0001 EA and the Vernal RMP Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (BLM, 2008), the BLM Utah State Office has confirmed that offering parcels 7688 and 1551 for competitive leasing would not have significant impacts individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area beyond those disclosed in the Vernal RMP EIS. Therefore, an EIS is not required.

Offering parcels 7688 and 1551 for competitive leasing, and the associated impacts, has been evaluated, consistent with the Council on Environmental Quality regulations, to determine “significance.” In accordance with 40 CFR 1501.3(b) [[1]](#footnote-2), a determination of significance requires consideration of both the “potentially affected environment” and the “degree” of effects. The affected area refers to the setting in which the action would occur (national, regional, or local) and its resources. Significance varies with the setting of the Proposed Action. The degree of the effects refers to the severity of the impact. The degree of the effects relates to four criteria outlined in 40 CFR 1501.3 (b) (2). The affected area and the degree of effects are disclosed in the EA Chapter 3.

###### Affected Area

Offering parcels 7688 and 1551 for competitive leasing involves 833.28 acres of BLM-administered minerals and surface estate. The nominated lease parcels are within an area designated as open to oil and gas leasing under standard terms and conditions and special stipulations identified in the Vernal RMP (BLM, 2008). Parcel specific stipulations and lease notices are attached to the parcels as specified in the EA, see Appendix B, with the potential impacts of the Proposed Action analyzed accordingly.

Although the act of leasing itself does not authorize development of the parcel, by leasing the parcel, a lessee has the right to use as much of the leased land as is necessary to explore and potentially develop the parcels for oil and gas production, subject to applicable laws, terms, conditions, and stipulations attached to the lease. Therefore, the potential impacts associated with the future potential development of the parcels are analyzed. No development may occur on any lease parcel until the BLM receives and subsequently approves a completed Application for Permit to Drill (APD) package (Form 3160-3) submitted by the lessee. APDs are subject to additional environmental review under NEPA and CEQ regulations (43 CFR 1500-1508), among other requirements.

As disclosed in the EA, Section 3.2.1, the future potential development, if all nominated lease parcels are developed, assumes there would be 20 wells, approximately 20 acres of surface disturbance, and total production of an estimated 5,000 barrels of oil and 5,0000,000 thousand cubic feet of gas. Refer to EA Section 3.2.1 for methodology for estimating well numbers, potential production volumes, and surface disturbance associated with the future potential development of the nominated lease parcels.

###### Degree of Effects

The following discussion is organized around the four criteria described at 40 CFR 1501.3(b)(2). This discussion focuses only on those issues for which detailed analysis in the EA was determined to be necessary.

**1. Both short- and long-term effects.**

Both short- and long-term effects related to the Proposed Action are disclosed and analyzed in EA Section 3.5 (for issues analyzed in brief) and Section 3.6 (for issues analyzed in detail). Short-term effects are defined as those that cease after well construction and completion (30-60 days) or cease after interim reclamation (2-5 years). Long-term effects are those associated with operation (*e.g.*, noise) or otherwise extend beyond the short-term period (for example, surface disturbance subject to final reclamation). Table 1 summarizes the short- and long-term effects associated with the issues analyzed in detail (see EA Section 3.6) and the incremental contribution of the Proposed Action to reasonably foreseeable environmental trends and planned actions.

**Table 1. Summary of Duration of Effects and Associated Significance Conclusions**

| **Issue (EA Section)** | **Short-term Effects and Significance Conclusions** | **Long-term Effects and Significance Conclusions** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Issue 1: What quantities and types of air pollutants would be produced from potential development of the nominated lease parcels? How would air pollutant emissions affect air quality and air quality related values? (EA Section 3.6.1) | Fugitive dust from vehicle traffic and wind erosion in areas of soil disturbance would result in PM10 and PM2.5 emissions. NO2, SO2, and CO would be emitted from vehicle tailpipes (EA Section 3.6.1)  Based on the reasonably foreseeable development of the two lease parcels, the maximum year emissions are estimated to be 4.3 tons/year of PM10, 1.2 tons/year of PM2.5, 17.7 tons/year of VOCs, 20.2 tons/year of NOx, 8.0 tons/year of CO, 0.149 tons/year of SO2, and 1.400 tons/year of HAPs (EA Table 19). This represents the maximum increase in pollutant emissions characteristic of the first year of construction and start of operation and amounts to a temporary increase of less than .10% to existing emissions within Uintah County. | Emissions are anticipated to decline during well production and operations as the need for earth-moving and heavy equipment decreases, which is the source of the majority of air pollutants. Based on leasing both nominated lease parcels, average yearly emissions over the entire production life of wells is estimated to be 1.4 tons/year of PM10, 0.3 tons/year of PM2.5, 13.3 tons/year of VOCs, 3.8 tons/year of NOx, 2.6 tons/year of CO, 0.031 tons/year of SO2, and 1.026 tons/year of HAPs (EA Table 19).  Ongoing operations of well sites would be subject to state and federal permitting requirements, which ensure compliance with air quality emission standards.  Long-term impacts to air quality related values are projected to be minimal because stipulations for air quality, ozone formation controls, and air quality analysis are included on all leases. No significant long-term effects are expected as a result of Alternative A. |
| Issue 2: How would future potential development of nominated lease parcels contribute to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and climate change? (EA Section 3.6.2) | While some GHG emissions occur over a short period, impacts associated with those emissions persist in the atmosphere, therefore all GHG emissions are considered long term effects. | The EA discloses potential short and long-term effects to climate change through several methods such as quantifying, as far as practicable, the reasonably foreseeable GHG emissions and social cost of GHG emissions (SC-GHG) as a proxy for assessing climate impacts. If the lease parcels are developed, GHG emissions are expected to result from the operation of wells, processing, and downstream end-use of the fossil fuel. For purposes of analysis, in the EA, the BLM assumed that all produced oil and gas would be combusted, and production practices would follow similar oil and gas fields with respect to the type of oil produced and emission factors expected from future production wells (average annual emissions over the entire life of a well). As a result of leasing both parcels, the total estimated annual direct and indirect GHG emissions from downstream would be 0.634 MT CO2e (see EA Section 3.6.2). The SC-GHG from the Proposed Action is estimated to range from $997.46 million to $2,842.93 million (EA Table 25).  The projected annual GHG emissions from potential development of both lease parcels are equivalent to 41,169 gasoline-fueled passenger vehicles driven for one year, or the emissions that could be avoided by operating 52 wind turbines as an alternative energy source or offset by the carbon sequestration of 227,409 acres of forest land.  The BLM continues to acknowledge that all GHGs contribute incrementally to climate change. The BLM must consider the effects of its onshore oil and gas lease sales on GHG emissions and climate change, and the Mineral Leasing Act provides the Secretary of the Interior with discretion to tailor those sales—including which parcels are offered for sale and the terms of leases—in light of climate effects. See, e.g., Wilderness Soc’y v. Dept. of the Interior, No. 22-cv-1871 (CRC), 2024 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 51011, at \*91-92 (D.D.C. Mar. 22, 2024). For this sale, the BLM relied on its own specialist report (the Annual GHG Report) and other data to compare the sale’s potential emissions with national and global emissions, and to contextualize the GHG emissions by estimating the social cost of the GHGs produced by future development of the lease, displaying the GHG emissions in comparison to commonly understood emissions sources such as motor vehicles, analyzing the real-world effects of climate change based on current scientific literature, and considering the emissions against climate action goals. The BLM further explained that it lacks the data and tools to estimate specific, climate-related effects from the sale. See Section 3.3.2 of original EA, as well as the 2022 Annual GHG Report. As of the publication of this FONNSI, there are no established thresholds, qualitative or quantitative, for NEPA analysis to assess the greenhouse gas emissions or social cost of an action in terms of the action’s effect on the climate, incrementally or otherwise. There is also no scientific data in the record, including scientific data submitted during the comment period for the original lease sale, that would allow the BLM, in the absence of an agency carbon budget or similar standard, to evaluate the significance of the greenhouse gas emissions from this proposed lease sale. In addition, these methodological shortcomings also prevent BLM from qualitatively comparing alternatives. For these reasons, the BLM has therefore not exercised its discretion to tailor this lease sale to account for global climate change. |

**2. Both beneficial and adverse effects.**

Potentially beneficial and adverse impacts related to offering the parcels for competitive leasing are disclosed and analyzed in EA Section 3.5, (for issues analyzed in brief) and Section 3.6 (for issues analyzed in detail). The potential for adverse impacts to the resources examined in the section headers labeled AIB-1 through AIB-22 will be minimized because of the applicable notices and stipulations, and the low likelihood for sensitive resources to occur within a lease parcel.

Table 2 summarizes the issues analyzed in detail (see EA Section 3.6), including the beneficial and adverse effects associated with each issue, and the incremental contribution of offering parcels 7688 and 1551 for competitive leasing to reasonably foreseeable environmental trends and planned actions.

**Table 2. Summary of Beneficial and Adverse Impacts of Issues Analyzed in Detail**

| **Issue Analyzed in Detail (EA Section)** | **Summary of Impacts (both Beneficial and Adverse) and Significance Conclusions** |
| --- | --- |
| Issue 1: What quantities and types of air pollutants would be produced from potential development of the nominated lease parcels? How would air pollutant emissions affect air quality and air quality related values? (EA Section 3.6.1) | Substantial air resource impacts are not anticipated from leasing as it is an administrative action, and no direct emissions would be generated. However, emissions may occur from future development of the leases. At the leasing stage it is not possible to accurately estimate potential air quality impacts by modeling due to the variation in emission control technologies as well as construction, drilling, and production technologies applicable to oil versus gas production and utilized by various operators. Should development on the parcels be proposed, and prior to authorizing specific proposed projects on the subject leases, emission inventories would need to be developed. At the permitting stage a precise emissions inventory can be evaluated to ensure emissions are below de minimis levels or conform to State and Federal implementation plans that are in effect at the time. As identified in notice UT-LN-102, additional analysis or mitigation may be required when parcels are developed to ensure no adverse impacts occur (EA Section 3.6.1). The cumulative analysis for air quality impacts anticipates that impacts will remain at current levels or improve. Modeled atmospheric concentrations for criteria air pollutants are projected to be below the National Ambient Air Quality Standards or show improvement (i.e., decreasing concentrations). Modeled visibility is generally projected to improve at Utah National Parks and deposition is estimated to remain below critical load criteria. Emissions of HAPs are not anticipated to substantially change the cancer and noncancer respiratory risks in the area of analysis (EA Section 3.6.1). |
| Issue 2: How would potential development of the nominated lease parcels contribute to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and climate change? (EA Section 3.6.2) | Potential environmental effects of the Proposed Action, including subsequent development of the lease parcels, were considered in the EA and the governing RMPs. As described and analyzed in the EA, future development of the subject lease may result in the emission of GHGs and may contribute to cumulative GHG emissions at the state, national, and global scales. Adverse effects could result from the contribution to global climate change and its effects.  BLM’s consideration of leasing lands that the Secretary has designated as eligible for oil and gas development is consistent with Federal Land Policy and Management Act’s multiple-use, sustained yield mandate for Federal lands as well as the Mineral Leasing Act’s requirement for quarterly lease sales in states where eligible lands are available for leasing. Should the subject leases be developed, they may beneficially contribute to state and national energy supplies. In addition, development of leases generates revenue that benefits state, regional, and national economics, but that development also can have adverse socioeconomic impacts in nearby communities.  The BLM continues to acknowledge that all GHGs contribute incrementally to climate change. The BLM must consider the effects of its onshore oil and gas lease sales on GHG emissions and climate change, and the Mineral Leasing Act provides the Secretary of the Interior with discretion to tailor those sales—including which parcels are offered for sale and the terms of leases—in light of climate effects. See, e.g., Wilderness Soc’y v. Dept. of the Interior, No. 22-cv-1871 (CRC), 2024 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 51011, at \*91-92 (D.D.C. Mar. 22, 2024). For this sale, the BLM relied on its own specialist report (the Annual GHG Report) and other data to compare the sale’s potential emissions with national and global emissions, and to contextualize the GHG emissions by estimating the social cost of the GHGs produced by future development of the lease, displaying the GHG emissions in comparison to commonly understood emissions sources such as motor vehicles, analyzing the real-world effects of climate change based on current scientific literature, and considering the emissions against climate action goals. The BLM further explained that it lacks the data and tools to estimate specific, climate-related effects from the sale. See Section 3.3.2 of original EA, as well as the 2022 Annual GHG Report. As of the publication of this FONNSI, there are no established thresholds, qualitative or quantitative, for NEPA analysis to assess the greenhouse gas emissions or social cost of an action in terms of the action’s effect on the climate, incrementally or otherwise. There is also no scientific data in the record, including scientific data submitted during the comment period for the original lease sale, that would allow the BLM, in the absence of an agency carbon budget or similar standard, to evaluate the significance of the greenhouse gas emissions from this proposed lease sale. In addition, these methodological shortcomings also prevent BLM from qualitatively comparing alternatives. For these reasons, the BLM has therefore not exercised its discretion to tailor this lease sale to account for global climate change. |

**3. Effects on public health and safety.**

In the EA, public health and safety-related effects are described and analyzed in Section 3.5 (AIB-7 [Environmental Justice], AIB-11 [Surface Water], AIB-22 [Human Health and Safety]), Issue 1 (Air Quality), and Issue 2 (GHGs and Climate Change). Development and construction may contribute to public health and safety–related risks including occasional fire starts; spills of hazardous materials, hydrocarbons, produced water, or hydraulic fracturing fluid and corresponding potential contamination of air, soil, or water; exposure to naturally occurring radioactive material (NORM) in drill cuttings or produced water; traffic congestion and collisions from commercial vehicles and heavy use; infrequent industrial accidents; presence of hydrogen sulfide; or increased levels of fugitive dust (PM10). EA Section 3.6.1 (Issue 1) explains that the Proposed Action would not result in an exceedance of any air quality-related standard that may impact public health and safety. Additionally, Section 3.6 discloses that the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts on other resources, including environmental justice populations (see AIB-7) and surface water (see AIB-11).

Leasing of the nominated lease parcels would not result in significant public health and safety-related effects in relation to the aforementioned issues. Leasing for oil and gas, and subsequent exploration and development, is a regular and ongoing activity in the region. In addition, the regulatory program associated with these issues successfully addresses the adverse effects of primary concern, and the BLM’s authority under standard lease terms and conditions allows the BLM to attach conditions of approval (which typically reduce or eliminate adverse effects on resources) to activities authorized at the time of lease development.

**4. Effects that would violate Federal, State, Tribal, or local law protecting the environment.**

None of the effects associated with the Proposed Action would violate any Federal, State, Tribal, or local law protecting the environment. This lease sale is consistent with applicable laws, land management plans, and policies. The public was given the opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis process during:

* An external, 30-day public scoping period, from February 13 to March 14, 2024
* A 30-day, public review and comment period of a preliminary EA from June 24 to July 24, 2024, and
* A Notice of Competitive Lease Sale will be made available for a 30-day protest period from December 18, 2024, to January 17, 2025.

In compliance with NEPA, the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA), and Executive Order 13007, the BLM UTSO the BLM provided project information and an invitation to consult on resources of concern to fourteen potentially affected Tribes for the Lease Sale. No Tribes requested government-to-government consultation under any authority (see also EA Section 3.4, AIB-6 and Section 4.2).

***NHPA***

Offering parcels 7688 and 1551 for competitive leasing was analyzed as part of Alternative A, the Proposed Action and would be in compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA (for details, see EA Section 3.5, AIB-4, and Sections 4.2 and 4.3). The BLM conducted a records review and analysis of the area of potential effect (APE) for the nominated lease parcels to determine if the undertaking would have an adverse effect to historic properties. The APE is defined as each of the lease parcels plus a 0.5-mile buffer. The BLM determined the APE in compliance with 36 CFR 800.4 (a) (1). The APE reflects the area in which cultural resources may be affected given reasonably foreseeable surface development associated with the lease parcels under current industry standards and horizontal or directional drilling technologies. The analysis in the EA, which also supports the Section 106 review, anticipates that there would not be significant adverse impacts to cultural resources due to identified cultural site densities coupled with standard lease terms and conditions, lease notices, and lease stipulations attached to each nominated lease parcel (EA Section 3.5, AIB-4).

The BLM has solicited additional information regarding the presence of and potential impacts to cultural resources, including those historic properties listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, through requests to consult with the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah & Ouray Reservation’s Tribal Historic Preservation Office and other potentially interested Native American Tribes, and consulting parties (see Section 4.2). Potential impacts to Native American concerns are discussed in the EA (see Section 3.5, AIB-6).

Additionally, pursuant to BLM Handbook 3120-1 – Competitive Leases (P) (H-3120), the following stipulation is attached to the lease parcels (see EA Section 1.5, Appendix A, and Appendix B in the EA):

This lease may be found to contain historic properties and/or resources protected under the National Historic Preservation Act, American Indian Religious Freedom Act, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, E.O. 13007, or other statutes and executive orders. The BLM will not approve any ground disturbing activities that may affect any such properties or resources until it completes its obligations under applicable requirements of the NHPA and other authorities. The BLM may require modification to exploration or development proposals to protect such properties or disapprove any activity that is likely to result in adverse effects that cannot be successfully avoided, minimized or mitigated. (H-3120 at 35).

###### Endangered Species Act

Offering Parcels 7688 and 1551 for competitive leasing was analyzed as part of Alternative A, the Proposed Action, and would be in compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (see EA Section 3.5, AIB-1 and Section 4.1) The EA discloses that six threatened or endangered species and eight sensitive species occur within the project area. The analysis in the EA indicates that leasing of the nominated lease parcels is not likely to adversely affect any species, or the critical habitat of any species, listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA because of restrictions imposed by lease stipulations, lease notices, and continued adherence to the ESA at later stages of well development. Nor is leasing of the parcels likely to adversely affect any species, or the habitat of any species, that is proposed or a candidate for listing as threatened or endangered under the ESA, therefore formal consultation was not required. Leasing of the parcels is also not expected to have an adverse impact on sensitive species, including those species that are neither listed nor proposed/candidates for listing under the ESA.

As also stated in EA Section 1.1 and Appendix B, the BLM has committed to attach the lease notices that it developed through the consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to the appropriate oil and gas leases at the time of issuance, which will serve to notify oil and gas lessees of any specific ESA-protected species or habitat present or potentially present on the subject lease parcels and the associated surface protection requirements that may be imposed pursuant to the ESA or other related laws, regulations or policies.

The BLM also coordinated with the USFWS and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) during the nominated lease parcel review process for the specific purpose of identifying and evaluating the potential impacts that the lease sale might have on plant and animal species, including those species that have been listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA, species that are proposed or candidates for ESA protection, and sensitive species that are neither listed, proposed, nor candidates for protection under the ESA. As part of this coordination during the lease parcel review process, the BLM consulted with the USFWS to identify the presence or potential presence of ESA listed, proposed, or candidate species and their habitat within the lease parcels to make determinations as to which of the protective measures available from the RMP, such as lease stipulations and notices, to attach to each of the lease parcels. The BLM also consulted with the USFWS and the UDWR regarding the adequacy of the protections afforded by the stipulations and lease notices available for attachment to the lease parcels (see EA Section 4.1).

Based on this coordination and informal consultation with the USFWS and the UDWR, the BLM determined that the reasonably foreseeable impacts from the leasing and development of both parcels would either be completely avoided or reduced to insignificant levels for animal and plant species that have been listed as threatened or endangered, are candidates or proposed for listing under the ESA, and sensitive species. (see EA sections AIB-1 and AIB-2)

Additionally, pursuant to BLM Handbook 3120-1 – Competitive Leases (P) (H-3120), the following stipulation is attached to the lease parcels (see Appendix B in the EA):

*The lease may now and hereafter contain plants, animals, and their habitats determined to be threatened, endangered, or other special status species. BLM may recommend modifications to exploration and development proposals to further its conservation and management objectives to avoid BLM approved activity that will contribute to a need to list such a species or their habitat. BLM may require modification to or disapprove a proposed activity that is likely to result in jeopardy to the continued existence of a proposed or listed threatened or endangered species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of a designated or proposed critical habitat. BLM will not approve any ground-disturbing activity that may affect any such species or critical habitat until it completes its obligation under requirements of the Endangered Species Act, as amended, 16 U. S. C. § 1531 et seq., including completion of any required procedure for conference or consultation.*

###### CONCLUSION

Therefore, on the basis of the information contained in the EA (DOI-BLM-UT-0000-2024-0001-EA) and all other information available to me at this time, it is my determination that:

* The degree of the effects of leasing Parcels 7688 and 1551 does not rise to the level of significance requiring preparation of an EIS (see criteria 1–4 explained in detail).

The Proposed Action is in conformance with the Vernal Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP), October 2008, as amended (BLM, 2008).

**Signed**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Christina Price  Deputy State Director  Division of Lands and Minerals  BLM Utah State Office |  | Date |

1. This EA and FONSI are processed under Council on Environmental Quality’s 2022 NEPA regulations. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)