

FONSI

DOI-BLM-CO-200-2012-0060 EA

Based on review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects from any alternative assessed or evaluated meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined by 43 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below.

RATIONALE:

Context:

Oil and gas leasing in the Royal Gorge Field Office includes all those federal fluid mineral resources in Colorado, east of the continental divide. The current lease contained parcels in Baca, Bent, Cheyenne, Crowley Kiowa, Lincoln, Otero, Prowers, and Weld Counties. Weld County is to some extent a mixture of urban and rural areas. Cheyenne, Crowley, Kiowa, Lincoln, Otero, and Prowers, Counties are eastern Colorado counties that exist as a patchwork of dry land farming and uncultivated short grass prairie. The settings of the lease parcels are rural in nature and most are distant from even small communities. Of those counties in the current lease, historically, Weld County has witnessed the greatest oil and gas development followed by Cheyenne, Baca and Kiowa. Bent, Lincoln, and Prowers Counties, have only had minor development. Crowley and Otero have no current producing wells. Implications from recognized benefits and problems associated with oil and gas leasing and development elevate the current action to one of regional significance.

Intensity:

Impacts that may be beneficial and adverse: There are no direct impacts to resources from the act of leasing. The indirect impacts from leasing would be the potential for future direct impacts from development of those leases at the APD stage. Beneficial impacts would include the potential for development of energy resources that would aid in reducing the nations reliance on foreign oil. Regional or local benefits could include the infusion of jobs and economic benefits to local business and governments. Adverse impacts at the development stage could potentially include drilling and production facilities and roads impacting wildlife, vegetation, riparian, cultural and visual resources. Potential impacts to these resources are addressed and mitigated through applying stipulations at the leasing stage and if necessary further mitigations and conditions being applied at the APD and production stage.

Public health and safety: Issues involving public health and safety that might arise at the APD and development stage include the industries potential impacts on air quality. BLM is

currently conducting an air analysis for the industry's impacts on Front Range air. One parcel, originally identified for this sale, is located within the 8-hour ozone non-attainment area in Weld County. The parcel is deferred pending the air analysis (see Attachment B of the EA). Other potential impacts to public health could be the potential for contamination at well and facility sites. Methods of preventing and containing such contamination are imposed on the operators Conditions of Approval at the APD stage.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area: The EA evaluated the area of the proposed action and determined that no unique geographic characteristics such as: Wild and Scenic Rivers, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, designated Wilderness areas, or Wilderness Study Areas; were present. Prime or Unique Farmlands are present on at least a portion of parcel #6493 in Bent County and parcel #6463 in Cheyenne County. Conditions of Approval will be applied to the APD stage to protect the irrigated portions of the parcels.

Degree to which effects are likely to be highly controversial: The potential for controversy associated with the effects of the preferred alternative is low. There is no disagreement or controversy among ID team members or reviewers over the nature of the effects on the resource values on public land by the proposed action.

Degree to which effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks: The act of leasing federal minerals for energy development is an established protocol for the BLM and one not normally involving unique or unknown risks.

Consideration of whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts: This action does not set a precedent for the act of leasing, since the leasing of federal minerals and more specifically fluid minerals has been occurring since the creation of the Mineral Leasing Act in 1920 and petroleum development in eastern Colorado dates back to the establishment of the Florence Field in 1862.

Consideration of whether the action is related to other actions with cumulatively significant impacts: The action of oil and gas leasing itself does not generate cumulative impacts to resource values. The potential development from those leases does have the possibility of generating such impacts. The cumulative impacts associated with leasing across the planning area were analyzed in the Royal Gorge RMP and Northeast RMP, as amended. At any given location cumulative impacts from oil and gas development along with other actions will be quite variable and a more accurate assessment is made during the APD stage. Through stipulations applied at the leasing stage and the additional controls of the Conditions of Approval at the APD stage and subsequent complete reclamation of a well site after plugging, cumulative impacts are significantly reduced.

Scientific, cultural or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places: Because the proposed lease sale does not involve ground disturbance, the proposed undertaking will have no effect on historic properties. Any future development of parcels that are purchased as a result of the lease sale will be subject to additional Section 106 compliance, including identification, effects assessment, and, if necessary, resolution of adverse effects. This requirement is outlined in lease stipulation CO-39

that is attached to each lease parcel. Two parcels, parcel 6289 in Kiowa County and a portion of parcel 6355 in Prowers County have been dropped from the original lease sale proposal because of National Historic designations.

Threatened and endangered species and their critical habitat: The act of leasing the parcels for oil and gas development would have no direct impact on wildlife resources; however, exploration and development of leased parcels would likely impact wildlife. The magnitude and location of direct and indirect effects cannot be predicted until the site-specific APD stage of development. However, the authorization to lease parcels for oil and gas development will likely result in future development at some locations. At this time, the speculative nature of this process does not provide specifics of reasonably foreseeable development; therefore, impacts to terrestrial wildlife from 146 available parcels remain unknown. The current lease development could potentially affect the following species: Mountain Plover, Swift Fox, Northern Goshawk, Lesser Prairie Chicken, American White Pelican, Ferruginous Hawk, Black-tailed Prairie Dog, Common King Snake, Milk Snake, Massasagua and Bald Eagle. All lease parcels are stipulated to potentially contain habitat for threatened, endangered, candidate, or other special status plant or animal (CO-34) providing the opportunity for future restrictions on development if said species and/or their habitat is found on the parcel. Parcels are also stipulated appropriately with provisions within respective RMPs to protect species that are currently listed or deemed sensitive.

Any effects that threaten a violation of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment: The proposed action conforms with the provisions of NEPA (U.S.C. 4321-4346) and FLPMA (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) and is compliant with the Clean Water Act and The Clean Air Act, the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Endangered Species Act.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: _____

Lonny Bagley
Deputy State Director
Division of Energy, Lands and Minerals

DATE SIGNED: _____