

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Uncompahgre Field Office
2465 South Townsend Avenue
Montrose, CO 81401**

Finding of No Significant Impact

(DOI-BLM-CO-150-2009-0004 EA)

Location: NW¼, Section 12, T46N, R18W, NMPM (Montrose County, Colorado)

Project Name: Last Chance Mining and Drilling Plan

Applicant: Nuvemco, LLC

Background

The BLM Uncompahgre Field Office has completed a draft of Environment Assessment (EA # DOI-BLM-CO-150-2009-0004), which analyzes the effects of continued operations of the Last Chance Mine (a small underground uranium/vanadium operation) under Prospecting Permit No. P-2007-018. To further evaluate this prospect, Nuvemco is also seeking to drill exploration boreholes on portions of adjacent claims (Last Chance claims #3, #2, and #1; plus the Bull Durham and Pam claims).

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in DOI-BLM-CO-150-2009-0004 EA, I have determined that the proposed action would not have a significant effect on the human environment. The proposed action includes design features that lessen the impact to the environment and resources.

Rationale

This FONSI is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context

The proposed action would occur on Davis Mesa, a rural mining and ranching area in

western Montrose County, Colorado. The combined mining and exploration activities would disturb less than 10 acres which would be confined to a 50 acre Plan of Operations site. Thus, the significance of this project depends primarily on its effects on the site and its immediate surroundings. Significance is also dependent on those effects which occur during the approximate three-year life of the proposed action as well as any residual effects which remain after mining, exploration, and reclamation are completed.

Intensity

1) *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse:* Beneficial impacts of this project would include a small number of new, good-paying jobs; an increased tax base for the local communities; and generation of mineral royalty revenue for the Federal government and Montrose County. Adverse impacts would be minor and short-term including increases in fugitive dust and exhaust emissions, impacts to vegetation and wildlife habitat, increases in soil erosion, slightly increased road traffic during drilling activities, and surface disturbance associated with borehole drilling.

2) *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety:* The proposed action would have minor impacts to public health and safety. It would result in minor increases in haul truck traffic (up to 4 trucks per week) along the ore hauling route. Minor increases in fugitive dust and exhaust emissions would be reduced to acceptable levels by operator-committed Best Management Practices (BMPs) for dust control and by following Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) emission standards. Impacts to water quality would be minor because of the absence of perennial surface waters or shallow aquifers at the project site. In addition, operator-committed BMPs for stormwater management will further reduce the possibilities of chemical contamination or sedimentation. Leaching of metals from stockpiled ore and waste rock would be relatively minor. No project-specific impacts related to hazardous or solid wastes are anticipated, assuming responsible use of chemicals and immediate containment and adequate cleanup in the event of spills. Public access to the mine site would eliminate public safety concerns. However, recreation and ranching activities bring individuals into the area who could be exposed to minor amounts of radiation associated with the project.

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:* One cultural resources site (a collapsed aboriginal wooden structure) was found within the 50-acre project site. The proposed action would avoid the site. Previously undiscovered sites and cultural properties could be affected by the proposed action. The BLM would be informed immediately of any new information or sites, and operations would cease until the BLM allowed them to continue. There is a possibility that some effects of drilling and mining would be noticed within nearby portions of the Dolores River Canyon Wilderness Study Area (WSA). Potential effects on the WSA would be reduced by topographic shielding and mitigated somewhat by application of BMPs for resources such as air and water quality.

- 4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:* Effects on the quality of the human environment are unlikely to be highly controversial because the proposed action involves a relatively small area and is similar to past and current uranium/vanadium mining and exploration activities at the project site and surrounding area.
- 5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:* The potential effects of uranium/vanadium exploration and mining on the human environment are well known as discussed in the Health and Safety section of this document.
- 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 proposed action will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. Future actions would be individually subject to NEPA analysis which would be independent of the decision regarding the current proposed action.
- 7) *Consideration of the action in relation to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts:* Direct and indirect effects of the proposed action would combine with the direct and indirect effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects to result in a cumulative effect to some resources. These include air quality, wilderness, cultural resources, soils, vegetation, invasive non-native species, TES (threatened, endangered, and sensitive) species, migratory birds, wildlife, water quality, access and transportation, noise, public health and safety, geology and minerals, and socio-economics. However, because the surface disturbance would be small and associated with an existing mine, the contribution of the proposed action to any cumulatively significant impacts within the Area of Influence (western Montrose County) would be minor.
- 8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources:* A collapsed aboriginal wooden structure was found within 500 feet of the active Last Chance Mine and was recommended as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. This site would be avoided by the proposed action.
- 9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat:* The proposed action would not result in any direct impacts to federally-listed species or their habitat since no such species occur in the project area. Water depletion associated with the proposed action would result in a “May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect” designation for the endangered Colorado River fish species. Thus, the proposed action would have a minor effect on these fish species.
- 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 federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for environmental protection.

Determination

This Finding of No Significant Impact is based on the information contained in the EA and my consideration of criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27). It is my determination that: 1) the implementation of the proposed action would not have significant environmental impacts; 2) the proposed action is in conformance with the San Juan/San Miguel Resource Management Plan (RMP); and 3) the proposed action does not constitute a major federal action having significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.

Approved:

This is an unsigned FONSI, released with the Draft EA for Public review and comment.

Barbara Sharrow
Field Manager
Uncompahgre Field Office

Date