

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Twin Falls District
Burley Field Office
15 East 200 South
Burley, Idaho 83318

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Raft River Geothermal Drilling Project
NEPA No. ID-220-2009-EA-3709

Finding of No Significant Impact

I have reviewed the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed activities documented in the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Raft River Geothermal Drilling Project (ID220-2009-EA-3709). Implementing regulation for NEPA (40 CFR 1508.27) provide criteria for determining the significance of the effects. Significance, as used in NEPA, requires consideration of both context and intensity as follows:

- (a) **Context: This requirement means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27).**

The disclosure of effects in the environmental assessment (EA) found the effects limited in context. The project area is limited in size and activities are limited in potential. Effects from any construction and drilling/testing are short-term and local in nature and would not significantly affect local, regional, or national resources.

- (b) **Intensity: This requirement refers to the severity of the impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The following are considered in evaluating intensity (40 CFR 1508.27).**

1. *Impacts that may be both beneficial and/or adverse.*

Impacts associated with the proposed action have been identified and discussed in the Environmental Consequences section of the EA (Chapter 4). The proposed action will not have any significant adverse impacts on the resources identified and described in the EA. However, not all of the

noise impacts can be fully mitigated. This will result in an adverse impact for the private landowner (Farley) whose residence is located 0.38 miles from the proposed RRDP-6 well site. The Farleys provided comments addressing their concerns over noise and light pollution that would take place from drilling and flow testing the proposed wells. They also experienced similar noise levels when U. S. Geothermal was drilling and testing wells. Modeling of the anticipated noise levels and a discussion of the impacts and possible mitigation measures is discussed in the EA (pages 4-8 through 4-11). Conditions of Approval (EA, Appendix C) have been added to mitigate, to the extent possible, the noise and light emissions related to the proposed activities. These non-mitigated adverse impacts would not be long-term, permanent impacts, but would affect the residence for six to eight weeks during drilling and up to one week during flow-testing of well RRDP-6. On the whole, the project would result in minimal environmental impacts and result in beneficial economic and potential future energy resource effects.

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

The proposed activities will not significantly affect public health or safety. Conditions of Approval (EA, Appendix C) have been developed to mitigate potential effects on public health or safety as identified in the EA in Chapter 4, Environmental Consequences. The project and its potential effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks.

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.*

The project area does not contain historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. (EA, Chapter 3 – Affected Environment).

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

Effects on the human environment from drilling exploratory geothermal test wells are not expected to be highly controversial. Similar activities on fee lands (U.S. Geothermal and the Department of Energy) in the same geographic area have not resulted in effects that were highly controversial.

Public comments from landowner (Randall Farley) in the vicinity of the proposed drill site RRDP-6(A) indicated that they were concerned about the anticipated noise and light pollution from the proposed action. Conditions of Approval (EA, Appendix C) have been added to mitigate, to

the extent possible, the noise and light emissions related to the proposed action.

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

Possible effects on the human environment were fully analyzed in the EA (EA, Chapter 4 – Environmental Consequences) and are well known and involve no unique or unknown risks. The proposed action is not unique or unusual.

6. *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The Raft River Geothermal Drilling Project proposed by Agua Caliente, LLC is site-specific and has been analyzed on its own merits in the EA. Any future similar actions or actions proposed for other geothermal-related activities such as utilization, etc. will be analyzed on their own merit separate from this action. The proposed action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

7. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.*

Based on the EA, no significant cumulative impacts are expected (EA, Section 4-19). The proposed action when evaluated together with other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable land disturbing activities in the area would not result in cumulatively significant impacts at the local or regional scale.

8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant, cultural, or historical resources.*

Based on the environmental analysis, (EA, Sections 4-3 and 4-10 thru 4-11) the proposed project will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed or eligible for listing. Nor would the proposed project cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.

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 Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

As discussed in the EA, (pages 4-15 thru 4-17) no federally listed, proposed, or candidate species under the Endangered Species Act are located in the project area or in the immediate vicinity. Therefore, there would be no impacts.

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 does not violate any known Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. Furthermore, the proposed action is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs.

APPROVED:

/s/ Michael Courtney

Michael Courtney
Field Manager
Burley Field Office

January 22, 2010

Date