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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management
[WY-060-1620-01; WYW141435]

Notice of Intent

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on a lease application received from Antelope Coal Company for Federal coal in the decertified Powder River Federal Coal Production Region, Wyoming, and Notice of Scoping on a modification to the lease application.

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SUMMARY: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) received a competitive coal lease application (WYW141435) from Antelope Coal Company (ACC) on February 14, 1997, for a tract containing approximately 177.5 million tons of Federal coal and including approximately 1,471 acres in an area adjacent to the company's Antelope Mine. ACC is a subsidiary of Kennecott Energy and Coal Company. The Antelope Mine is located in northern Converse County, Wyoming; the lease application area is located in Campbell and Converse Counties, Wyoming. The tract, which is referred to as the Horse Creek LBA Tract, was applied for as a maintenance tract lease-by-application (LBA) under the provisions of 43 Code of Federal

Regulations (CFR) 3425.1. The Powder River Regional Coal Team (RCT) reviewed the competitive lease application at their meeting on April 23, 1997, in Casper, Wyoming, and recommended that it be processed. On May 1, 1998, BLM received an application from ACC to modify the area included in the proposed Horse Creek LBA Tract. The modified tract includes approximately 2,838 acres and approximately 356.5 million tons of coal. The BLM is currently requesting comments from the public on specific concerns or issues that BLM should consider in processing the modified application for the Horse Creek LBA Tract.

BLM conducted scoping on the original lease application in November 1997, including a public scoping meeting held at the Tower West Lodge in Gillette, Wyoming, on November 13 at 7 p.m. As part of that scoping process, BLM requested comments on whether an EIS or an Environmental Assessment (EA) would best satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

After consideration of the comments received during the scoping period and discussions with the applicant, the BLM determined that the requirements of NEPA would be best served by preparing an EIS for this lease application. The Office of Surface Mining will be a cooperating agency on the EIS.

DATES: As part of the public scoping process on the modified lease application area, the public has the opportunity to submit written comments on concerns or issues that the BLM should address in processing the modified lease application. BLM will accept comments on the modified lease application at the address given below. Comments should be submitted by July 24, 1998, in order to be considered in the draft EIS.

ADDRESSES: Please address questions, comments, or concerns to the Casper District Office, Bureau of Land Management, Attn: Nancy Doelger, 1701 East E Street, Casper, Wyoming 82601, or fax them to 307-234-1525.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Nancy Doelger or Mike Karbs at the above address, or phone: 307-261-7600.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On February 14, 1997, ACC filed coal lease application WYW141435 for the following lands in Campbell and Converse Counties, Wyoming:

T. 41 N., R. 71 W., 6th PM, Wyoming
Section 22: Lots 2 and 3;
Section 23: Lots 10 thru 16;
Section 25: Lot 11;

Section 26: Lots 1 thru 8, 12, and 13;
Section 27: Lots 5, 6, 11 thru 14, and 16;
Section 34: Lots 1, 7, 8 thru 10, and 16;
Section 35: Lots 8 thru 10;
Containing 1,470.570 acres more or less with an estimated 177.5 million tons of coal.

On May 1, 1998, ACC filed a modification to the Horse Creek LBA tract which added the following lands to the area applied for:

T. 41 N., R. 71 W., 6th PM, Wyoming
Section 14: Lots 5 thru 7, and 10 thru 15;
Section 15: Lots 6 thru 11, and 14 thru 16;
Section 22: Lots 1, 4 thru 6, and 9 thru 13;
Section 23: Lots 2 thru 7;
Section 25: Lot 12 (S 1/2);
Section 27: Lots 1 thru 3;
Containing 1,493.470 acres more or less.

The Horse Creek LBA Tract application modification also removed the following lands from the area applied for:

T. 41 N., R. 71 W., 6th PM, Wyoming
Section 22: Lot 2;
Section 27: Lots 6 and 11;
Containing 126.130 acres more or less.

The modified Horse Creek LBA tract includes the following lands:

T. 41 N., R. 71 W., 6th PM, Wyoming
Section 14: Lots 5 thru 7, and 10 thru 15;
Section 15: Lots 6 thru 11, and 14 thru 16;
Section 22: Lots 1, 3 thru 6, and 9 thru 13;
Section 23: Lots 2 thru 7, and 10 thru 16;
Section 25: Lots 11 and 12(S 1/2);
Section 26: Lots 1 thru 8, 12, and 13;
Section 27: Lots 1 thru 3, 5, 12 thru 14, and 16;
Section 34: Lots 1, 7, 8 thru 10, and 16;
Section 35: Lots 8 thru 10;
Containing 2,837.91 acres more or less with an estimated 356.5 million tons of coal.

The Antelope Mine, which is adjacent to the lease application area, has an approved mining and reclamation plan from the Land Quality Division of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality and an approved air quality permit from the Air Quality Division of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality to mine up to 30 million tons of coal per year. According to the application filed for the Horse Creek LBA Tract, the maintenance tract would be mined to extend the life of the existing mine.

Using the LBA process, ACC acquired maintenance coal lease WYW128322, containing approximately 617 acres and 60 million tons of minable coal adjacent to the Antelope Mine, effective February 1, 1997.

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) will be a cooperating agency in the preparation of the EIS. If the Horse Creek LBA tract is leased to the applicant, the new lease must be incorporated into the existing mining

plans for the adjacent mine and the Secretary of the Interior must approve the revised mining plan before the Federal coal in the tract can be mined. OSM is the Federal agency that would be responsible for recommending approval, approval with conditions, or disapproval of the revised mining plan to the Secretary if the tract is leased.

The lease application area is within the boundaries of the Thunder Basin National Grasslands. Some of the surface lands in the area were formerly under the jurisdiction of the United States and were administered by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) as part of the Thunder Basin National Grasslands. As a result of recent land exchanges between the USFS and local landowners, however, there are no longer any surface lands within the lease application area that are under the jurisdiction of the USFS, and as a result, the USFS will not be a cooperating agency in the preparation of the EIS.

There are six surface coal mines (Jacobs Ranch, Black Thunder, North Rochelle, Rochelle, North Antelope, and Antelope) located southeast of Wright, Wyoming, in southern Campbell County and northern Converse County. Since decertification of the Powder River Federal Coal Region in 1990, these mines have leased approximately 10,360 acres including approximately 1.2 billion tons of minable Federal coal, and have applied for approximately 8,900 additional acres of Federal coal.

Several issues related to this lease application were identified during the initial scoping in November of 1997, including the potential impacts to wetlands, aquifers, agricultural producers, wildlife, wildlife habitat, wildlife-based recreation, cultural resources, and access to public lands that may occur if a lease is issued for this tract, and the potential for conflict with development of existing oil and gas leases in this area, including coalbed methane. If you have specific concerns about these issues, or have other concerns or issues that BLM should consider in processing this application, please address them in writing to the above address. Written comments should be received by July 24, 1998, in order to be fully considered in the draft EIS.

Dated: June 15, 1998.

Alan L. Kesterke,

Associate State Director.

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