

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**Bureau of Land Management**

[WY-060-1620-01, WYW141435]

Notice of Scoping on a Coal Lease Application (WYW141435) Received From Antelope Coal Company

SUMMARY: On February 14, 1997, BLM received a coal lease application (WYW141435) from Antelope Coal Company (ACC), a subsidiary of Kennecott Energy and Coal Company. The application covers about 1,470 acres of Federal mineral estate and includes approximately 177.5 million tons of coal in Campbell and Converse Counties, Wyoming. The application area, called the Horse Creek Tract, is adjacent to ACC's existing Antelope Mine. The Horse Creek Tract application is a maintenance Lease-by-Application (LBA) under 43 CFR 3425.1. The Powder River Regional Coal Team (RCT), at their April 23, 1997, meeting in Casper, Wyoming, reviewed the application and recommended BLM process this lease application.

BLM requests comments from the public on which of the following options would best satisfy the requirements of NEPA for processing the Horse Creek LBA. Both options would analyze the impacts of issuing a coal lease for the area included in the application.

Option 1 is to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA). The Horse Creek tract is adjacent to the existing Antelope Mine. If leased to the applicant, the Horse Creek Tract would be mined to extend the life of the Antelope Mine. No other existing operation is able to mine the Horse Creek Tract either as a maintenance lease or as a new mine start. The Horse Creek Tract is partially surrounded by existing Antelope Mine, Federal and State leases, and the surrounded portion of the tract will probably be bypassed if not mined with the existing leases.

Option 2 is to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This is the second application filed by ACC. In addition, this is BLM's ninth maintenance coal lease application from the six surface coal mines located immediately east and southeast of Wright, Wyoming, since 1990 when the Powder River Federal Coal Region was decertified. All are in southeastern Campbell and northern Converse Counties, Wyoming.

After reviewing the scoping comments, the BLM will decide whether to prepare an EA or an EIS for the Horse Creek Coal Tract application.

DATES: A public scoping meeting is scheduled at 7 p.m., on November 13, 1997, at the Tower West Lodge, 109 North U.S. Highway 14-16, Gillette, Wyoming. If you have concerns or issues you believe the BLM should address in processing this lease application, you can express them either verbally at the scoping meeting, or by mail, or fax written comment to BLM at the address below by November 30, 1997.

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 telephone: 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 P.M., 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.

The Antelope Mine is adjacent to the lease application area. The Antelope Mine has an approved mining and reclamation plan, 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 Tract, the maintenance tract would be mined to extend the life of the existing mine.

The ACC previously acquired maintenance coal lease WYW128322, containing approximately 617 acres adjacent to the Antelope Mine, using the LBA process, effective February 1, 1997.

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) will be a cooperating agency in the preparation of the environmental analysis. The OSM is the Federal agency responsible for recommending approval, approval with conditions, or disapproval of the mining plan to the Secretary of the Interior. If this maintenance tract is leased to the applicant, the new lease must be incorporated into the existing mining plans for the adjacent mine. The Secretary must approve those mining

plans before the coal in the tract can be mined.

Although the lease application area is within the boundaries of the Thunder Basin National Grasslands, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) will not be a cooperating agency in the preparation of the environmental document because none of the surface estate is currently owned by the Federal Government.

The major issues related to this lease application that have been identified to date, include the potential increases in impacts to air quality, groundwater, and wildlife that may occur if this lease is issued. If you have specific concerns about these issues, have other concerns or issues BLM should consider in processing this application, or if you have comments on whether BLM should prepare an EA or an EIS to evaluate the impacts of issuing a lease for this tract, please address them in writing to the above individuals or state them verbally at the November 13, 1997, public scoping meeting at the location shown above. The BLM will accept written comments at the address shown above through November 30, 1997.

Alan R. Pierson,*State Director.*

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