

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
WY040-EA09-163
Bureau of Land Management
High Desert District
Rock Springs Field Office
280 Highway 191 North
Rock Springs, WY 82901

1. Introduction

Proposed Action Title: North Dutch John 1

Proposed Action Type: Drill a natural gas well utilizing a pre-existing well pad and construct an access road.

Location of Proposed Action: Pre-existing well pad and access road is located in SWSE of section 3, T. 12 N., R. 107 W., Sweetwater County, WY.

Applicant: Questar Exploration and Production Company

Subject Function/Lease/Serial/Case File No.: WYW159186

Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plan:

Name of Plan: Green River Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: August 8, 1997

BLM regulations 1610.5-3 require actions to be in conformance with the approved land use plan. The Proposed Action is in conformance with the Green River Resource Management Plan (GRRMP). The RMP decision pertaining to this proposal includes:

Record of Decision (ROD) and Green River RMP (1997), page 12, Oil and Gas Management, and page 40, Sugarloaf Basin Management Area:

1. To provide for leasing, exploration and development of oil and gas while protecting other values.
2. The area is open to mineral leasing and related exploration and development activities with appropriate mitigation requirements applied to protect all other resource values.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose and need is to meet the energy demands of the United States as provided by the Green River RMP, Oil and Gas Management objectives, the Energy Policy Act of 2005, the Minerals Leasing Act of 1920 as amended, the Federal Land Policy Management Act of 1976 as amended, and 43 CFR 3160. The proponent requires an approved Application Permit to Drill (APD) and right-of-way (ROW) to develop natural gas.

The decision to be made with this analysis is to determine whether the action of the APD and ROW will be approved.

Scoping and Public Involvement and Issues

An initial onsite was held April 10, 2008, with Questar Exploration and BLM Rock Springs Field Office specialists. The BLM specialists identified the need to resubmit the application and move the well from its proposed location in SESE of section 3, T. 12 N. R. 107 W. to a pre-existing well site (Gorge-Federal 1) located in SWSE of section 3, T. 12 N., R. 107 W. to avoid new surface disturbance in the Wild Horse Basin of the Sugarloaf Basin Management Area.

The re-staked North Dutch John #1 well proposal was revisited by Questar Exploration representatives, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department officials and BLM specialists on May 19, 2009. A new well proposal application stating the location revisions was submitted to the BLM Rock Springs Field Office on July 13, 2009. A 15-day public comment period for the project proposal was distributed to the local media on August 12, 2009. A public tour of the proposed well site was held on August 18, 2009.

The BLM Rock Springs Field Office received one comment from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department regarding the well proposal. The comment was taken into consideration and addressed with the rifle and bow hunting season avoidance stipulation between the dates of September 1 through November 30 and the mule deer and elk winter range time avoidance stipulation between the dates of November 15 through April 30.

2. Proposed Action and Alternatives

Description of Proposed Action:

The proposed action is to drill one well up to 16,120 feet deep on a pre-existing well pad and construct 70 feet of new access road.

The surface use plan (including operator committed measures and best management practices) is part of the APD and provides specific details for access to the well pad. Drilling operations are described in the drilling program section of the APD which provides the drilling details. If the well produces hydrocarbons, production facilities would be authorized under a sundry notice. Subsequent approvals will be required for pipelines or other facilities to move fluids off lease.

The original well site proposal located in SESE section 3, T. 12 N., R. 107 W. by Questar Exploration has been moved to a pre-existing well site (Gorge-Federal 1) located in SWSE section 3, R. 12 N., R. 107 W.

All production facilities will be painted shale green Munsell standard color (#5Y 4/2) except where specific safety colors are required.

The following seed mix is required for both interim and final reclamation of the well pad and access road:

SEED MIX D--Mountain shrub (15-19"PPT ZONE)

Grasses--USE ALL

Bluebunch wheatgrass	6 LBS/ACRE
Letterman needlegrass	6

Mountain brome	6
Canby bluegrass OR	4 LBS/ACRE EACH
Sandberg bluegrass OR	
prairie junegrass OR	
mutton bluegrass	

<u>Forbs</u> --USE TWO	
Arrowleaf balsamroot	1 LBS/ACRE EACH
Silky or mountain lupine	
Rocky Mountain penstemon	

Description of Alternatives Analyzed in Detail

The proposed action by Questar Exploration has been moved from SESE section 3, T. 12 N., R. 107 W. to a pre-existing well site (Gorge-Federal 1) located in SWSE section 3, R. 12 N., R. 107 W.

The proposed action was relocated to a pre-existing well pad to avoid new surface disturbance within the Wild Horse Basin.

Under the “no action” alternative, the APD/ROW would be denied, forcing Questar Exploration to find other means of natural gas extraction and access to the area. It should be noted that if this alternative were selected, it would not preclude approval of subsequent drilling proposals.

Alternatives Considered but not Analyzed in Detail:

Internal scoping by BLM specialists suggested the possibility of utilizing the pre-existing (Gorge-Federal 1) well site to avoid new surface disturbance within the Wild Horse Basin. Questar Exploration agreed to relocate the original proposal to the alternative in order to avoid new surface disturbance.

3. Affected Environment

The proposal is located on a pre-existing well pad and utilizes existing access roads. If productive, the well pad and access road will be used for the life of the well. The final reclamation will be done immediately following the well plugging unless written approval is given by the authorized officer. Final reclamation requires the entire well pad surface and access road to be recontoured and seeded to return the area to its original condition or better.

A productive natural gas field does not exist in the Sugarloaf Basin Management Area. The well site is proposed on a pre-existing well location and access road in an isolated area not visible from U.S. Highway 191 South or County Road 33. Three wells were previously drilled in section 3. However, these wells were abandoned without producing a saleable amount of natural gas or oil.

The “no action alternative” would prevent Questar Exploration from drilling for natural gas and halt any access to the well pad. The pre-existing well pad will remain undisturbed and the access road would not be constructed.

4. Environmental Effects

Direct and Indirect Effects

Description of Impacts (Quantitative): The well pad will re-disturb approximately 3 acres during construction; disturbance would be reduced to less than 1 acre if the well is a producer. The access road will disturb approximately 0.1 mile (0.08 acres).

Short-term impacts will be dust and noise during the construction. The long-term disturbance (well pad, access road, soil, and vegetation) will be reclaimed when the well is no longer producing in paying quantities.

Selection of the “no action alternative” would prohibit Questar Exploration from drilling for natural gas and access to the well pad. The soil and vegetation would not be disturbed.

Cultural

A class III inventory of all areas of potential effect has been conducted for the proposed undertaking. It has been determined that there will be **no effect** on historic properties within the area of potential effect.

Wildlife

This proposal and relative data have been analyzed as to the impact of the proposed action upon special status plants and wildlife, raptors, and other species of high state and federal concern. The analysis indicates that there would be a **no effect** situation as a result of approving this action.

Construction, drilling and other activities potentially disruptive to mule deer and elk winter range are prohibited from November 15 to April 30.

Questar Exploration has agreed to an Operator Committed Measure of not drilling and/or not beginning surface disturbing activities during bow and rifle hunting seasons for deer (Area 102) and elk (Area 31) between the dates of September 1 through November 30.

Cumulative Effects

This is an exploratory well proposal. The 3.0-acre pad and 0.8-acre access road is located in an isolated area. It is anticipated that the cumulative impacts associated with the project (well pad and access road) would not be significant due to the scope of the proposal and would not negatively impact the environment.

However, the BLM Rock Springs Field Office has received a 2D geophysical project proposal on section 3 and on the nine sections immediately to the south of the proposed North Dutch John 1 Well. The 2D geophysical project data results may lead to a productive natural gas field in the future. The cumulative impacts from a potential productive natural gas field may result in long-term wildlife habitat fragmentation, an increase in air emissions, an increase in noise pollution, and potential damage to County Road 33 partly due from an increase in natural gas field traffic.

Therefore, the potentially productive natural gas field would cumulatively add to the impacts of the 2D geophysical proposal.

The Sugarloaf Basin Management Area supports past, present, and future recreational hunting and camping, OHV activities, wildlife habitat, riparian areas, aquifer recharge zones, and livestock grazing. The area is also open to mineral leasing, related exploration, and development activities with appropriate mitigation requirements applied to protect all other resource values. Mitigation measures, such as, mule deer and elk winter range and a seasonal bow and rifle hunting season avoidance applied to the project proposal, would minimize the cumulative effects in the Sugarloaf Basin Management Area. The scope of the North Dutch John Well proposal would not contribute significantly to the cumulative effects.

Under the “no action” alternative, the cumulative effects of short-term surface disturbance would not occur. If the proposal is not approved, Questar Exploration would have to find another means of extracting the natural gas and accessing the area.

Residual Effects

This is an exploratory well proposal. A productive natural gas field does not exist in the Sugarloaf Basin Management Area. The proposal is located on a pre-existing well site and utilizes existing access roads. If productive, the 3-acre well pad and 0.08-acre access road will be used for the life of the well. The well pad will be reduced to less than one acre and seeded with a mixture of native grasses and forbs during production to reduce any residual effects. The access road will disturb approximately 0.08 acres.

Under the “no action” alternative, the residual effects from the access road and well pad would not occur. Questar Exploration would have to find another means for the natural gas extraction and area access to be in compliance with the terms of their lease.

5. Tribes, Individuals, Organizations, or Agencies Consulted

Onsite Date: April 10, 2008

Other Persons/Agencies Consulted: Heidi Camp – Permit Agent; Sarah Boxley – Permit Agent; Jeromy Caldwell – BLM – Supervisory Wildlife Biologist; Penny Spears – BLM - Archeologist

Onsite Date: May 19, 2009

Other Persons/Agencies Consulted: Jeromy Caldwell – BLM – Supervisory Wildlife Biologist; Heidi Camp – Permit Agent; Kevin Spence – Wyoming Department of Game and Fish; David Hayes – Wyoming Department of Game and Fish.

A 15-day public comment period for the project proposal was distributed to the local media on August 12, 2009. A public tour of the proposed well site was held on August 18, 2009.

6. List of Preparers

Jeromy Caldwell – BLM - Supervisory Wildlife Biologist; Penny Spears – BLM – Archeologist

Reviewer: _____ Date: _____

Preparer: Russell Boulware

Date: October 29, 2009