

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
SPOKANE DISTRICT, WASHINGTON STATE**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT TITLE PAGE

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NUMBER OR-135-09-EA-015	SERIAL NUMBER WAOR 62012-01	DATE OF REPORT May 7, 2009
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BLM RESOURCE AREA Border	COUNTY Benton
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TYPE OF ACTION

Development of, and Issuance of Competitive Mineral Material Sales from, a Benton City Community Pit (Federal Parcel)

APPLICANT'S NAME BLM – Spokane District Office	ADDRESS (Include zip code) BLM – Spokane District Office 1103 North Fancher Spokane, WA 99212
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DATE(S) OF FIELD EXAMINATION – Numerous examinations over a five year period (continuing)

LANDS INVOLVED

Township	Range	Meridian	Section	Subdivision	Acres
T. 09 N.	R. 27 E.	Willamette	20	SE¼SW¼	~72.5

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To determine the environmental effects of developing a mine and issuing competitive mineral material sales for removal of up to 20,000,000 tons (approximately 900,000 tons/yr) of sand and gravel from this Federal parcel over an estimated 20 to 30 year period.

I. Introduction

A. Background:

The Tri-Cities area of Richland, Pasco, and Kennewick has been growing rapidly for many years. To help meet the mineral materials demand associated with this growth, the Bureau of Land Management Spokane District - Border Field Area proposes to develop a sand and gravel, community pit southeast of Benton City, WA. A 72.5 acre, federally owned parcel at this location has been evaluated and found to contain substantial mineral material (sand and gravel) resources. Information this determination includes, previous mining trespass on the parcel, drilling on and near the parcel, surface inspection, high degree of local mineral material producers and a current market appraisal. On August 26, 2005, Benton City zoned the lands adjacent to this federal parcel for light industrial use.

On June 3, 2005, Kevin Devitt, the Border Resource Area Manager submitted a notice to the Oregon/Washington State Office, designating the parcel as the Benton City Community Pit. On October 13, 2005, A&B Asphalt, Inc., a Washington aggregate company, operating a sand and gravel pit on private land adjacent to the proposed Benton City Community Pit site, submitted a formal request to BLM for a Competitive Mineral Materials Sale at the site. The proposed project area would encompass most of the 72.5 acres of fee simple (surface & subsurface) Federal ownership. Property boundary buffer zones and pit wall setbacks would be employed to avoid physical impacts to adjacent property.

A&B Asphalt, Inc. has been extracting sand and gravel from the adjacent 80 acre private property situated to the south of the federal parcel since the mid 1980s. Early in 2005, BLM resolved a trespass where A&B Asphalt had entered onto a 2.8 acre portion of the BLM administered parcel described herein. With the successful resolution of this trespass issue, A&B Asphalt is eligible for, and has requested BLM, to initiate a Competitive Mineral Material Sale on the subject parcel. Several other local mineral material producers have also shown great interest in developing this deposit.

This environmental assessment (EA) describes the proposed action and no action alternative. It analyzes environmental and social impacts of developing this property, evaluates any mitigating measures which might be necessary to lessen local impacts of the project, it describes the mining and reclamation proposals and examines the ultimate land use alternatives for this parcel upon mine closure and reclamation.

B. Type of Action:

This action includes assessment, development, and reclamation planning of an economically significant mineral materials (sand and gravel) deposit near Benton City, WA.

C. Purpose and Need for Proposed Action:

The purpose of the proposed action is to comply with federal laws and regulations, and the Spokane District Resource Management Plan Record of Decision (RMP/ROD - 1987). Personal communications with Central Premix and A&B Asphalt indicate that the area is running low on mineral material resources to develop. This action is needed to ensure a reliable, local supply of reasonably priced mineral materials to support continued community growth and related infrastructure. It is also a response to a request from a local company for BLM to make minerals available at the proposed site.

Section 302 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 directs the Secretary of the interior to manage public lands under the principles of multiple uses. Minerals are specifically identified as one of these multiple uses in the Act.

The Act of July 31, 1947 as amended (Mineral Material Act) provides for the disposal of mineral materials from public lands managed by BLM (30 USC 601 et seq). The Secretary of the Interior has discretion to permit the competitive sale of mineral materials to private companies.

The Code of Federal Regulations (434 CFR 3601.6) states that it is BLM's policy "to make mineral material available unless it is detrimental to the public interest to do so;" and "to protect public land resources and the environment and minimize damage to public health and safety during the exploration for and the removal of such minerals."

The Spokane RMP/ROD (1987) states that "salable minerals, including common varieties of sand, gravel, and stone will continue to be made available to local governments and the general public." It also states that "new material sites may be developed as needed, when they are consistent with the protection of other resource values."

The population of the Tri-Cities area of Washington, approximately 10 miles east of the site of the proposed action, has grown by over 34,000 over the past 6 years (US Census 2006). It is the fastest growing area in Washington, and among the top growth areas in the Pacific Northwest. As a result, there is a large regional demand for mineral materials, such as gravel, to support the development of local infrastructure.

A& B Asphalt, an adjacent sand and gravel mining company, has made an official request for access to the material situated on the Federal Benton City Community Pit site. Other mineral material companies have shown similar interest and will be included in subsequent competitive sales.

D. Public Involvement

Public involvement for this proposed project was achieved in numerous ways which included:

- A formal request from and discussion with a local mining company for BLM to make this mineral material resource available for development due to local market demand.
- Discussions with local other mineral material mining companies to determine the general availability and need for mineral materials development in this market area.
- Development and two separate publications in the local newspaper, of the initial Environmental Assessment (EA) for this proposed project.
- Two separate face-to-face presentation meetings with the Benton City Council and Mayor of Benton City.
- Continued communication and informal site meetings with the Mayor and the Benton City Planning Engineer to explain BLM plans and continue to gather information regarding community concerns and support of the proposed project.
- Collection of public comments resulting from publication of the EA in the local newspaper.
- Careful consideration and response to public comments received and modification of the initial EA to address and incorporate those comments into the proposed project plan.
- Allowing a 6 month period for further comments and development of a Master Plan for the development of Benton City.

- Re-publishing the modified EA in the local newspaper for additional public comments.

As a result of the above actions, local concerns were identified and incorporated into this document in various appropriate sections. Generally, concerns included noise, visual impacts, water impacts, affect on future tourism, traffic patterns, reclamation and benefits for Benton City.

E. Location of Proposed Action:

This project is located about 1 mile southeast of Benton City, Benton County, WA, adjacent to major transportation routes. The legal description of this tract is Township 9 North, Range 27 West, Section 20, SE ¼ SW ¼, Willamette Meridian (Attachments 1, 2, 3 and 4). The project area is wholly within the Border Field Area of the BLM Spokane District.

F. Compliance with Applicable Land Use Plan:

The proposed action conforms to the Spokane Resource Management Plan Record of Decision (1987), as discussed in the Purpose and Need section above.

G. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans:

The proposed action is in conformance with federal law and regulations as described in the Purpose and Needs section above.

II. Proposed Action and Alternatives

Two alternatives are analyzed in this document: 1) Offering mineral materials from the Benton City Community Pit for competitive bid sale and; 2) No Action.

A. Description of Proposed Action

BLM will offer the mineral materials at the designated Benton City Community Pit site, for disposal through competitive sale. After awarding a contract to the successful bidder, the contracted party will be required to develop a detailed mining and reclamation plan for BLM approval prior to initiation of any mining operations. Prior to approval of the mining and reclamation plan, BLM may require mitigation measures or stipulations as conditions of approval. For purposes of analysis, it is assumed that the following generalized scenario will occur and the described actions will be part of the mining and reclamation plan.

A mineral materials (sand and gravel) pit would be sequentially developed over most of the 72.5 acre Federal parcel, excluding 50 foot property buffer zones around the west, north and east perimeter of the parcel. The southern proposed pit highwall would be mined out concurrently with the adjacent A&B Asphalt highwall to create a relatively flat area. Mining would be accomplished through competitive sales contracts issued to a private mining company. The company would subsequently mine the parcel at an estimated rate of about 500,000 to one million tons per year for approximately 20 to 30 years or until the resource is exhausted and the site is fully reclaimed. The ultimate pit bottom elevations are projected to be about 400 feet and 500 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) for the larger western and narrower eastern portions of the parcel respectively. These pit floor elevations may vary depending on resource and groundwater conditions encountered during mining.

The property would be developed using open pit mining methods with concurrent reclamation of mined out areas. The location of the pit is isolated from populated areas by surrounding mining operations, railroad, farming and vacant state lands. There would be a 1,400 foot buffer between the north crest of the proposed pit and the freeway to the north. Freeway background noise is substantial and would mask most mining operation noise. The surrounding 50 foot buffer and upper slopes of the highwall would be reclaimed first and progress downward as the pit develops. Mining will be governed by a pre-development mining plan to ensure that BLM mining requirements. An adjacent gravel pit (A&B Asphalt) has developed up to the south and east boundaries of the Federal parcel. This previous development should allow complete mining, through the south and east boundaries of the Federal parcel. This would result in maximum resource recovery from this area of the Federal parcel. The outcome of this scenario would be consistent with the Benton City planning department's proposal of a near-level, light industrial site at this location. The north and west sides of the Federal parcel pit would be developed leaving a 50 foot property boundary buffer and utilizing 2 horizontal to 1 vertical (2:1) final pit highwall slopes for safety and to enhance post mining revegetation. During most of the mining life at the proposed Benton City Community Pit there will be no water present in the pit and therefore no need to pump uncontaminated water into the existing groundwater infiltration pond adjacent to the pit. Toward the end of the proposed operation, after groundwater is encountered in the lower portions of the pit, uncontaminated groundwater from the pit would be pumped into the infiltration pond that is currently used by the A&B Asphalt operation. It is anticipated that complete mining of the parcel would result in a small lake in the bottom of the pit. This pit lake would remain after mining and reclamation as a water feature and as a source to replace a percolation pond which will dry up after pit dewatering ceases.

Sand and gravel would be loosened from the pit using bulldozers to push down the highwall slopes into the developing pit bottom where large rubber tire loaders will fill haul trucks or load the material directly onto an in-pit conveyor system. No blasting would be required initially for mining of the loose fluvial (stream) gravels in the upper portion of the deposit. As the pit deepens, exposed basalt bedrock would be blasted, and then crushed to add an additional valuable material product stream from the pit. Loaded material would be transported to an "in-pit" crushing / screening facility. This facility would be located below grade after the pit is established, to reduce local noise levels and aesthetic impacts to the surrounding area. Water sprays would be used during all phases of material handling to reduce fugitive dust. The mineral material would be crushed, sorted, washed and stockpiled for further processing, load-out and commercial sale. Stockpiled product would be loaded into highway dump trucks, weighed on-site and hauled off the property by-way-of existing paved access roads and highways.

Temporary haul roads would be constructed and removed within the pit as necessary to access the deposit. Support equipment in the pit would consist of 4x4 pickup trucks, a truck rinsing facility, water trucks for dust suppression, dewatering pumps and pipelines, maintenance vehicles, and power supply lines. All mining, processing, and high traffic areas associated with this operation would have water sprays to reduce potential generation of fugitive dust. Operations would comply with Benton Clean Air Authority requirements. Power has already been established to the site and would be used to operate processing equipment and support administrative facilities. A single 250' deep water well would be required initially, and would probably be located in the southwest portion of the parcel. This well would supply potable water for the employees at this operation. Process make-up water for the mine would be purchased from the Benton City municipal water system located near the northwest corner of the parcel. Based on previous mining at the adjacent A&B Asphalt pit, the BLM pit development is expected to encounter groundwater at about 200 feet below the ground surface. Below that level,

excess water will be pumped from the pit into the adjacent dry wash impoundment area, also on federal property, to the southwest (Attachment 3). Mine water discharged from the A&B Asphalt pit has previously been directed into this percolation area. If available, a portion of the excess pit water will be used as make-up water to control dust and wash the gravel. Used water will be run through a series of settling ponds to remove the majority of particulates. The remaining clean water would be allowed to seep back into the ground through the percolation pond bottom to replenish the water table from which it was removed. The percolation pond would consist of impoundment of the adjacent dry wash to the southwest of the project site. The pit will be designed with a centripetal drainage layout where the majority of the surface runoff water at the site flows towards the center of the pit for collection and redirection into the adjacent percolation pond.

“Surfer” computerized three-dimensional software models were constructed of both the original land surface and the proposed pit limits (Attachments 5 and 6). These models calculate a potential available resource of over 16 million tons. Actual minable tonnage is estimated to be closer to 20 million tons due to the ability to completely remove of the south pit highwall during mining, leaving a nearly level connection with the adjacent A&B Asphalt property. These estimates are supported by outcropping sand and gravel exposures on the parcel, A&B Asphalt’s directly adjacent highwall lithology to the south, surrounding water well lithologic data from the Washington Department of Ecology and Washington State Department of Transportation drill-hole data.

The generic mining scenario presented above is included to provide the reader a general concept of what the proposed sand and gravel mining project plan of operations will include. In addition, the following mitigation measures would also be required of the successful bidding company by BLM, through a formal competitive bid contract.

- Facilities will be developed at the site, in accordance with applicable regulations (CFR 43 3601.41 and CFR 43 3601.43), including septic facilities and water supply systems which meet local codes. BLM will require the successful bidder for this resource to work closely with the Benton-Franklin Health District to develop all required facilities. No buildings will be constructed, and no equipment will be stored within 100 feet of the existing drainage.
- Haul roads leaving the site would be watered or paved and connected directly with paved local access roads and the Benton City freeway interchange to minimize fugitive dust from leaving the site.
- Mining activity would occur during the daytime hours and most operations (crushing, screening, etc.) would be preformed within the pit walls to minimize noise impacts to the local community. Earthen berms and vegetative screens would be used to reduce winds, fugitive dust and to dampen any mining related sounds.
- If pit water is encountered during mining operations, pumping will be utilized to dewater the local pit area. Uncontaminated water pumped from the pit will be run through settling ponds then directed into the adjacent drainage containment and allowed to slowly infiltrate back into the local aquifer.ust generating activities (i.e. loading and crushing) within the pit will be continuously controlled by water trucks and dust control spray systems to comply with Benton Air Authority applicable standards. Concurrent

reclamation would help stabilize local soils and reduce fugitive dust generation. The entire highwall of the site will be fenced to exclude and protect the public from entering into a potentially dangerous pit or equipment operation area. Pit slopes will be reclaimed concurrent with mining, beginning at the crest of the pit and proceeding downward with mining. Stable, final reclamation slopes of about 2 horizontal to 1 vertical will be planned and incorporated into the mining operation sequence to prevent over-steepened final pit walls during mining. Pit slopes will be contoured and re-vegetated with native plants, concurrent with mining. During the final mining sequence the company will be required to develop a sculpted pit-bottom lake shoreline, designed to enhance wildlife habitat and provide for human recreation. In addition, a recreational access area will be developed on the south side of the pit lake and a trail system will be installed by the mining company to enhance recreation opportunities. The company will consult with the Benton City representative and BLM to determine suitable facilities and locations. Ultimately, the entire pit will be reclaimed with fifty foot property setbacks at the top of the remaining highwalls.

- If an archaeological resource (historic or prehistoric site or object) is discovered by the operator or any person working on the operator's behalf, on federal lands, the operator shall immediately stop all operations in the area, notify the Authorized Officer (Field Manager, Border Resource Area) verbally, and follow up such verbal notification with a written confirmation (certified mail recommended). In accordance with 43 CFR §10.4 (c)(d) and (g), if the discovery includes human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony, operations shall remain suspended and the discovery protected for thirty (30) days or until a written notice to proceed is issued by the AO. An evaluation of the resource or remains will be made by the AO and appropriate mitigation actions will be identified in consultation with the SHPO, consulting tribes, and holder. Holder shall be responsible for evaluation and mitigation costs. All archaeological materials shall remain the property of the United States.
- Initial ground clearing will not be conducted within the nesting season for migratory songbirds (March 1-July 30).
- The mine plan shall include a provision to survey for Townsend's ground squirrels and burrowing owls prior to ground clearing. The mine plan will also include a provision to relocate either of these species off site prior to initial ground clearing and plan for the eventual repatriation of such species to the reclaimed habitat in coordination with the BLM and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

B. No Action Alternative

BLM would not offer the mineral material for competitive sale. No additional mineral materials in excess of those previously trespassed by A&B Asphalt would be removed from this parcel.

III. Affected Environment

A. General Setting

Surface material at the Benton City Community Pit site is generally Pleistocene glacial Lake Missoula outbreak flood debris, Yakima River terrace sand and gravel deposits and surficial wind-blown loess deposits. These materials vary from fine grained to large boulders in size and rest upon regional Columbia River basalt flows. This deposit is the result of sedimentary sorting

in the Yakima River Channel and subsequent bar deposition in relatively low energy, slack-water areas behind Goose Hill, in the abandoned portion of the original Yakima River Canyon.

The parcel area is open space with no development. It has an arid climate, no native trees, and it is predominantly covered by low sagebrush and grasses (see photo in Attachment 7). Slopes on the parcel are generally flat or gently graded to the west or southwest. The sandy nature and high porosity and permeability of the wind-blown topsoil minimize erosion associated with rain events, although some gullies are present locally.

Surrounding area land-use includes sand and gravel mining to the south, vineyards and orchards to the east, farming to the south, and residential development further to the west. The highest monetary value for this property is mineral resource development. According to Adam Schatz (owner), the adjacent A&B Asphalt mine produces about 900,000 tons of sand, gravel and crushed rock per year with associated asphalt and concrete production facilities located on-site. This requires estimated 60 truck/pup traffic cycles per day, 320 days per year. Reserves at the A&B Asphalt property are rapidly being depleted. The company has expressed interest in bidding for access to minerals on the adjacent BLM parcel, as have several other local and regional producers. The mine has completed some reclamation on a portion of the BLM parcel where they performed unauthorized mining, in the intermittent stream channel where they installed an unauthorized drainage ditch and on some of the highwall slopes of their pit which encroached onto BLM.

B. Air Quality:

Air quality on the parcel is generally good due to open space, nearly continuous southwesterly winds dissipating local dust, open rural setting and lack of population concentrated around the site. Recreational activities on adjoining BLM public land in the Horse Heaven Hills to the southwest should not be affected by any fugitive dust from the site. Local sources of air contaminants are the adjacent sand and gravel mining operation (A&B Asphalt) to the south and east, farming to the south and west, adjacent railroad line to the south, dirt roads on-site and to the east and west, and residential wood stove heating to the west. Fugitive dust issues are present in this area and should be addressed in mine/reclamation planning. Benton Clean Air Authority states on their website that: "Compared to other urban areas in Washington State, the Tri-Cities has some of the cleanest air over the majority of the year. Our average pollution levels are well below the national average. However, on occasion, the Tri-Cities does (do) have problems with a pollutant called "particulate matter". Particulate matter is a federally regulated pollutant; in high concentrations, it poses a health risk to both sensitive populations and to healthy, active people as well" (Benton Clean Air Authority 2007).

C. Water Quality:

No permanent surface waterways protected by the Clean Water act are present on or directly adjacent to this proposed mine site.

The subject parcel is at an average elevation of about 550 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) and adjacent to an intermittent stream channel grading to the northwest. The nearest permanent surface water feature in the area of the subject Federal parcel is the Yakima River, situated about ½ miles to the northwest and about 60 to 80 feet down gradient from the site. Groundwater is present at an estimated elevation of 350 to 400 feet AMSL on the subject Federal parcel.

Currently only seasonal water occurs on the parcel from winter rains and snowmelt. Some water is present in the gully on the southern portion of the parcel, as a result of pit dewatering from the adjacent A&B Asphalt mining operation. Overall water quality at the site is thought to be good due its groundwater origin and the ability for pit water discharge to locally support abundant vegetation and wildlife in the discharge percolation pond area. On April 2, 2008, BLM collected two sediment and one water quality samples from the stream and infiltration pond areas down gradient of the A&B Asphalt operations. No contaminants of concern were noted in the analyses of these samples. Washington State Department of Ecology does not rate the small intermittent streams adjacent to the mine area.

Section 303(d) of the Federal Clean Water Act requires Washington State to periodically prepare a list of all surface waters in the state for which beneficial uses – such as for drinking, recreation, aquatic habitat, and industrial use – are impaired by pollutants. These are water quality limited estuaries, lakes, and streams that fall short of state surface water quality standards, and are not expected to improve within the next two years. A description of the Washington State Water Quality Assessment can be viewed on the web at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/303d/introduction.html>. The Yakima River to the northwest of this proposed operation site is rated as Category 5 waters due to increased temperatures, PH problems, the presence of chemical contaminants such as Dichloro-Diphenyl-Trichloroethane (DDT), Poly Chlorinated By phenols (PCBs), Dioxins, endosulfan, and others (Johnson, 2006). This contamination appears to be the result of concentrated agriculture in the Yakima River Valley. No discharge will occur from the proposed mine into the Yakima River. Currently, there is an effort to acquire local water rights adjacent to the Yakima River in an attempt to use them to enhance flow volume and dilute concentrations of pesticides and fertilizers currently contaminating the river as a result of agriculture activity in the area. Any uncontaminated groundwater flow resulting from this proposed operation should be viewed as a benefit for the Yakima River water quality. Ground water flow at the mine site is thought to be to the southeast, down the old Yakima River canyon, rather than towards the Yakima River which is situated to the northwest of the site. BLM does not intend to allow the introduction of any contaminated water onto the surface or into the local groundwater systems as a result of mining at this site.

D. Cultural Resources:

A Class III cultural inventory was completed for this site and no cultural resources were found. The Washington State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) has given concurrence on this proposed project.

E. Recreation Use:

Recreation on this site is currently limited to motorcycle and ATV riding, trapshooting and occasional hiking on the network of sandy access roads that dissect the parcel. These activities would be lost on the 72 acre site during the life of the proposed operation. Alternate locations for these activities are available at the Horse Heaven Hills BLM parcel within ½ mile to the southwest and on the Washington State parcel directly to the north of the subject parcel. Upon completion of the project, the area would be fully reclaimed for wildlife habitat and recreational use on a portion of the resulting pit bottom lake.

F. Soils:

Soils on this Federal parcel are poor and exhibit minimal, if any, organic A horizon. There is a substantial thickness of fine grained wind-blown loess to a depth of 0 to 50 feet in some places on the proposed site. Gravel outcrops at the surface on the BLM subject parcel.

G. Vegetation:

Vegetation on the site is minimal and limited to sagebrush, small shrubs, grasses and a variety of noxious weeds on the upper portion of the parcel. No native trees occur on the parcel although A&B Asphalt has planted and irrigates some trees which act as a visual screen along their access road right-of-way. Willows are present in the gully where pit dewatering and subsurface saturation has supported their growth. Partial reclamation has been completed on the A&B Asphalt pit to reduce fugitive dust emission. A BLM site evaluation found no special status plant species or communities of concern.

H. Visual Resources:

Visual resource impacts at this site are limited. The area consists of a basalt bluff (Goose Hill) to the northeast, orchards and vineyards to the east, farmlands to the south and sparse residential development to the west. The site is not visible from the town of Benton City, and only the more rural farms and orchard areas to the south and southeast will be able to view parts of the operation. Interstate 82, located to the north of the parcel, may have minor distant views (one mile) of the pit highwall area. A Scenic Quality – Visual Resource Inventory was completed using the BLM 8410 manual. This inventory is designed to assess key factors which include Landforms, vegetation, water, color, influence of adjacent scenery, scarcity and cultural modifications. A visual quality score of nine was determined from the Scenic Quality Inventory and Evaluation Chart which corresponds to a low scenic quality of C.

I. Wildlife:

The 72.5 ac project area is situated in an approximately 14,400 ac patch of shrub-steppe habitat on Goose Hill and consists of open ground with low sagebrush vegetation. Wildlife is likely limited on the parcel due to the isolated nature of the habitat and fragmentation of the surrounding area. The existing A&B Asphalt sand and gravel mine, agriculture, urban expansion and Highway 82 contribute to the fragmentation. Wildlife which may inhabit the area include: mule deer, coyote, black-tailed jack-rabbit, long billed curlew, Townsend's ground squirrel, burrowing owl, and various species of songbirds. Migratory water fowl may use the adjacent manmade wetlands. Jackrabbits, curlews, burrowing owl and Townsend's ground squirrels are all BLM sensitive species, which are declining largely due to habitat loss. No known occurrences of these species are documented to the project area. Preliminary surveys have not found any of these species in the project area, but comprehensive surveys in the appropriate season have not been done.

M. Wetlands:

Pit dewatering from the A&B Asphalt mine has created a temporary wetland in the adjacent wash to the south of the proposed mine area. This area has previously served as a settling pond for pit dewatering from the A&B Asphalt pit. This area is not normally a wetland due to the local arid climate lack of natural water source but wildlife temporarily uses this human-made resource for a successful habitat.

N. Transportation:

The active A&B Asphalt operation, situated adjacent to and south of the proposed project, currently hauls sand and gravel and concrete to the local markets. The A&B operation is similar in size (900,000 tons per year) to the proposed project (500,000 to 900,000) and dispatches an estimated 50 company trucks and 10 private contractor trucks per day for a total of 60 trucks per day hauling from the site. These trucks access the site through a one half mile paved right-of-way across BLM property on Field Road, to the I-82 freeway interchange at Kiona.

O. Socio-economic:

The State of Washington is currently developing a 4,400 acre Red Mountain American Viticultural Area (AVA) on the north side of the I-82 interstate highway. This development should create a boost to the local economy through support services for the wine industry and by increased tourism and recreation. Both Benton City and Benton County intend to develop facilities to capitalize on increased tourism (i.e. hotels, restaurants, retail stores, etc.). While only some of the AVA development is currently in place, development of such a large project will require large supplies of mineral materials for construction of access roads, aggregate for concrete foundations and bridges, fill material and in the development and repair to infrastructure (roads, freeway access ramps, parking lots, etc.) It is estimated that each new home will require about 400 tons of sand and gravel for completion. A one lane-mile of a four lane interstate highway will require about 38,000 tons of sand and gravel to complete and about 15,000 tons of aggregate will be needed for each average sized school or hospital. Average annual per capita consumption of aggregates in the United States is currently about 10 tons.

The U.S. Census Bureau data shows Benton County median household income for 2004 to be \$52,922 and an unemployment rate of 5.7% in 2005 (**Fedstats, 2005**). Personal income in Benton County in 2004 averaged \$30,572. Mining related jobs such as equipment operation, heavy truck driving, and paving operation average \$46,000, \$37,000, and \$34,000 per year respectively (**Monster, 2007**). The current A&B Asphalt operation employs 120 people in these higher paying positions, at labor union scale. These jobs average about \$50,000/year per employee.

IV. Environmental Impacts

A. Impacts from the Proposed Action:

Air Quality:

Direct impacts to local air quality as a result of this project would be short term in nature. Impacts would include on and off-site dust generation, batch plant gases, and motor vehicle emissions from on-site mining and processing operations. These impacts will decrease throughout the mining process as the operation decreases its operational footprint size and operations are limited to within the pit. Partial reclamation during mining and vegetative screens will also help to reduce migration of particulates. Air quality impacts should cease upon conclusion of mining and final reclamation.

Any fugitive dust issues will be addressed in the mining plan and controlled using a variety of processing water sprays, haul road watering and paving of roads leading to and from the property. Dust levels will initially be moderate due a cumulative effect of the proposed mining operation being situated adjacent to the active A&B Asphalt operation. If A&B ends up being the successful bidder for the mineral material site, their operations will probably convert over the federal parcel immediately without significant increase in dust generation. Regardless, in about 5 years A&B Asphalt will probably run out of material and the fugitive dust factor contributed by that operation should cease. Dust emission from the new operation located on the BLM parcel would meet air quality standards as directed in the federally authorized and monitored mine plan of operations.

Water Quality:

There should be no measurable effects on the Yakima River from this proposed operation due to its non-connectivity with the site. Surface water quality at the site may show some initial impacts due to the disturbance of fine grained sediments associated with mining of sand and gravel. These “fines” will be controlled through the use of settling ponds within the pit proper to filter and re-use the water. A percolation pond would be developed to reintroduce clean pit dewatering discharge water into the local groundwater. The pit will establish a centripetal drainage where the majority of runoff water at the site will flow towards the center of the pit. This runoff would be captured and directed into the adjacent percolation pond located to the southwest of the pit. Overall, surface and groundwater quality at this site should not be significantly affected with proper abatement controls incorporated into the mining plan. A percolation pond would be developed to reintroduce clean pit dewatering discharge water into the local groundwater.

Cultural:

Since no cultural resources were found on the site and no cultural resource impacts are anticipated. The requirement to cease operations and contact BLM in the event that cultural resources are found would minimize the potential for impacts to undiscovered resources.

Recreation:

Because of the limited recreational use of the BLM subject parcel, the availability of directly adjacent state parcels, and the availability of federal lands of similar character within ½ mile to the southwest, little disruption to recreational activities is expected as a result of this project.

Soils:

Most soils available at the site will be removed and stockpiled during development and mining. They will be redistributed during sequential reclamation of the pit walls and access roads. Soil supplements may be added on the pit highwall areas to promote revegetation.

Vegetation:

Most of the original surface vegetation would be removed with the topsoil which is to be stockpiled for later application during the reclamation phase of this project. As the mine develops, concurrent reclamation of the pit high walls would eventually re-establish more vegetation than was originally present due to the increased surface area associated with the slopes. Re-introduction of vegetation would be engineered to provide native species preference, suitable slope control, and enhance wildlife habitat.

Visual Resources:

A common community concern is visual impacts resulting from this project. View shed for a portion of this area will be affected with the development of a 72 acre sand and gravel operation just southeast of Benton City. Overall view character will not change greatly from the current views due to the existence of the adjacent 80 acre A&B Asphalt operating sand and gravel pit to the south of the parcel. While the operation will create a large open pit to the south of Benton City, several methods will be employed to mitigate the impacts. These include vegetative visual screens and earthen berms, much like those employed by the adjacent A&B Asphalt mining operation. Proposed development of the BLM parcel will appear as an extension of the existing pit that has operated at that location since the 1980s. Long term visual impacts, when the pit is established to below current topographic surface elevations, will be improved from the initial stages of the project. As quickly as possible, the mining operation will be contained within the pit proper and out-of-site of the general view scape. Concurrent reclamation of the upper portion of the pit walls and earthen berms and vegetative screens will enhance views for the surrounding

properties. While travelers on the busy freeway may be able to detect the pit highwall at distance from the west, the pit should not be significantly visible from the Benton City interchange or from the town of Benton City. There should be no visual signature detectable from the Red Mountain AVA and no adverse impacts to tourism.

Wildlife:

Short term effects on wildlife include the loss of 72 acres of shrub-steppe habitat in the pit area during the period of active mining. Direct effects to BLM sensitive species would be mitigated by survey and relocation of any Townsend's ground squirrels or burrowing owls, and timing of the initial ground clearing to avoid the nesting season of migratory birds, long-billed curlews, and jackrabbits. Disturbance from mining operations (noise, traffic, dust) could limit wildlife use of shrub-steppe habitat directly adjacent to the active mining area.

In the long term, loss of wildlife habitat would be mitigated by rehabilitation of the pit area. Native sagebrush-steppe plant species would be planted or seeded on the contoured slopes of the pit. Approximately 62 acres would be reclaimed. Eventual loss of a temporary wetland (created by water discharge from the adjacent A&B Asphalt and the proposed operation) would be mitigated by the creation of a permanent pit bottom lake.

During mining, pit lake water discharged into the percolation pond would not contain any contaminated materials. Water would be clear or slightly clouded and would have no negative impact on wildlife or humans. Pit water in the adjacent drainage from the mine discharge would actually provide additional range and forage which would enhance the viability and variety of wildlife in the local area. Some wildlife habitat will probably improve beyond current conditions due to engineered slope contouring, reclamation using selected beneficial native species, and the presence of a permanent pit lake water source. For that reason, long term wildlife impacts resulting from this project should be minimal.

Wetlands:

Once the BLM parcel has been mined down to the local water table, discharge from the pit into the percolation pond would be used to replace previous discharge from the A&B Asphalt operation which should be ending operations due to consumption of resource. Continued operations at the BLM site would lengthen the period for which the percolation pond area would be useful habitat. The temporary wetland created in the adjacent drainage would be maintained until the pit lake of approximately 10 acres could be established during reclamation. Discharge to the temporary wetland would then cease and the wetland vegetation would be replaced by the pit lake habitat. Once mining activities cease, water in the pit lake is expected to be clear except during extremely high run-off events which might carry sediments from the surrounding hillsides into the lake.

Transportation:

The distance from the BLM property boundary to the freeway on-ramp is about 2,800 feet, consisting mostly of a paved, gravel pit access road. Traffic in and around the pit area will increase from the current level as the proposed facility develops. Ultimately, the removal of about 500,000 to one million tons/yr from this parcel would replace production at the A&B Asphalt site which is currently producing about 900,000 tons/yr (2008). Assuming a 320 days per year operating schedule, full production at the new project site would result in about 60 (calculated) dump truck and pup trailer vehicle trips, or fewer, larger capacity transport belly-dump truck round-trips, per day. That would equate to a truck leaving or arriving at the property approximately every 10 minutes. This anticipated traffic when combined with the current A&B Asphalt vehicles for the initial operation years would result in increased traffic flow near the

mine area. If A&B Asphalt is the successful bidder for the federal parcel permit, their operations are expected to remain constant and simply shift to the federal parcel. In either case, a centralized radio truck dispatcher or installation of a traffic light at the intersection of Badger/Weber Canyon Road and Field Road (Mine Access Road) may be required and would be included in an approved mining plan.

If the A&B Asphalt mine continues to operate on private property, it will probably run out of resources over the next 5 years. At that time, local truck traffic will be associated more and more with this proposed operation and less with the A&B Asphalt site. Long term, traffic would be roughly equivalent to that of the current A&B Asphalt mine which has a similar production rate to that of the proposed federal parcel. Favorable location of the parcel on a well maintained, lightly used paved road which is directly adjacent to a major freeway interchange (I-82 Kiona) would minimize the effects of temporary traffic increases. Trucks are able to enter and leave the property almost directly onto an interstate freeway system without passing through high-traffic municipal or residential areas.

Socio-economic:

This project would create or continue a significant number (estimated 100+) of high wage employment opportunities at the mine, batch plants and trucking facility. The jobs would be available to local residents of Benton County and the surrounding area. In addition, economic ripple effects, some estimates of five to six support jobs to service the mine jobs (restaurants, stores, schools, etc.) will spread out into the community increasing the number of local job opportunities. This proposed mine would also ensure a stable supply of reasonably priced mineral materials to support future community development.

The Red Mountain AVA project to the north will require extensive mineral material resources to support infrastructure in support of the planned development. The Benton City Community pit ensures that a sufficient volume of mineral materials will be situated nearby. It is located in an area already developed for mining by the A&B Asphalt Company and the Benton City pit reclamation is planned to be integrated with reclamation at the A&B pit to create a valuable community resource area when mining is completed.

Municipal tax base will be enhanced through project development and sales, to help support the local community infrastructure. Mine production could also generate nearly a million dollars per year or more in royalties to the federal treasury, depending on gross sales and negotiated royalty rates.

A common community concern is visual impacts resulting from the project. While the operation will create a large open pit to the south of Benton City, several methods will be employed to mitigate the impacts. Vegetative visual screening will be used to block the view of the pit or blend it into the surrounding environment. At the same time, most of the mining operation will occur within the pit and out-of-site of the general viewscape. While travelers on the busy freeway may be able to detect the pit highwall at distance, the pit should not be visible from the Benton City interchange or from the town of Benton City. Likewise, there should be no visual signature detectable from the Red Mountain AVA. As a result of proper planning, there should be no adverse impacts to tourism due to the mining operation. In the long term, the reclamation of the pit lake into a recreational swimming and fishing area should increase local tourism.

B. Impacts from No Action

If no action is taken on this proposal, conditions at the site will remain relatively the same as they are now. The area would remain undeveloped with some increase in dispersed recreation activity due to increasing population in the area. Farming and orchards would continue to dominate the landscape to the east. Benton City has annexed some State of Washington land and private land near the parcel and proposes to develop the area into a light industrial park or vineyard related operation in the future.

Mining at the adjacent A&B Asphalt property to the southeast would continue up to the boundaries of this Federal parcel or until all available resources at that site are utilized. High paying mine related jobs in the Benton City area would then be eliminated and the economic ripple effect benefits to the local community through support services for mining would be reduced.

Pit dewatering for the A&B operation would then cease and the man-made habitat area in the adjoining gully would dry up. No replacement habitat would be available for the displaced wildlife as there is not a pit lake at the A&B Asphalt operation.

Limited recreation would continue at the site. It is anticipated that there would be increased impacts related to refuse dumping and increased dust generation from increased use of dirt roads on the parcel.

C. Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative short term impacts related to this project will be an additional loss of 72 acres of shrub-steppe wildlife habitat; this is in addition to the 4,000 proposed acres of vineyards, proposed by Washington State to be developed at the Red Mountain American Vitacultural Area on the north side of Interstate Highway 82. Reclamation of the Benton City Community pit operation will reestablish a 72 acre area of shrub-steppe and riparian habitat.

Fugitive dust, processing off-gases and vehicular emissions will also occur, to some degree, at this site. According to the Benton County Clean Air Authority, "Compared to other urban areas in Washington State, the Tri-Cities has some of the cleanest air over the majority of the year. "Our average pollution levels are well below the national average." Due to relatively consistent winds and dispersion; it is anticipated that these impacts should be minimal at the parcel, and insignificant beyond ½ mile downwind from the project area. With dust abatement procedures designed into the mine plan and the concurrent phased reclamation, emissions from the proposed mine should not significantly affect short term cumulative air quality in the local or regional area. Long term air quality will be minimally or not impacted after reclamation is complete.

Other current local air contaminant sources include agricultural soil disturbance, chemical herbicide spraying on orchards, fugitive dust and off-gases from the adjacent A&B Asphalt mine and associated AJ Crushing operation, dirt roads, residential wood stove particulates, adjacent railroad service, adjacent freeway traffic, and wind-blown dust from large tracts of vacant land. Development of this new parcel would add to these sources of potential contaminants but would be regulated under the Benton County Clean Air Authority which responded to our initial publication of the project EA with enthusiasm on working with BLM to organize and regulate the project.

Another cumulative impact related to this project is increased local traffic near the mine. Traffic from the currently operating A&B Asphalt mine, increasing residential populations, tourism,

vineyard and agricultural development and increased activity near the freeway interchange will all contribute to traffic congestion in this area. Coordination with county planners and thoughtful development of the mining plan associated with this resource will address necessary controls and minimize increased traffic impacts.

D. Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures would be incorporated into the mining and reclamation plan as described in the Proposed Action.

V. Consultation and Coordination

A. Individuals and Organizations Consulted:

- Robert Spink of Spink Engineering in Richland, WA, a planning consultant for Benton City, WA was consulted regarding the land use planning and zoning of the private and municipal lands surrounding this parcel.
- Two presentation meetings were held at the Benton City Council chambers on February 21, 2008 and on March 6, 2008. During these meetings, BLM staff presented a PowerPoint presentation covering all aspects of the proposed action. Questions were answered and discussion was held which highlighted local interest and concern for the project. Most comments were simply a repeat of the initial public responses provided from the public comment period. BLM assured the group that the issues which had been raised would be analyzed and addressed. Later, BLM agreed to a six month moratorium, ending February 2009, to allow Benton City to develop a Master Plan for development of the city. No master plan was written or provided by Benton City during this period.
- Robin Priddy of the Benton Clean Air Authority was consulted regarding initial assessment of potential on and off-site impacts to local air quality from the proposed mine.
- On March 8, 2006, notification letters concerning the Benton City Community Pit proposed operation were sent to the State of Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), and the Yakima Indian Nation.
- In a letter dated March 14, 2006, the State of Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DASP) concurred with the findings of the AHS cultural report, that “No Historic Properties are Effected” for the proposed Benton City Community Pit.

B. Databases Consulted:

The following databases were used to review the subject area for known cultural resources and threatened and endangered (T&E) plant and animal species at or near the project area.

- State of Washington-Department of Fish and Wildlife Priority habitat and Species Database.
- State of Washington-Department of Natural Resources-Washington Natural Heritage Plant Database.
- State of Washington-Office of Archaeology and Historical Preservation Site Database.
- Bureau of Land Management Resources Inventory Database and other records.

VI. List of Preparers

The following personnel were involved in the field evaluation of this parcel:

BLM Representatives

Rich Bailey - Spokane District - Archeologist
Lori Baker - Spokane District – Recreation Specialist
Barb Benner - Border Resource - Area Botanist
Kelly Courtright - Spokane District - Mining Engineer
Al Gardner - Border Resource - Area Forester
Joe Kelly - Spokane District - Fisheries Biologist
Rick McComas - Border Resource Area - Range Specialist
Scott Pavey - Spokane District - Environmental Coordinator
Thomas Sweeney - Border Resource Area - Geologist
Joyce Whitney - Border Resource Area – Biologist
Jason Lowe - Border Resource Area - Biologist

Other Individuals Consulted

Philip Paterno - U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Business Center –
Certified General Appraiser

VII. References

Bjornstad, B. and Fecht, K., 2002, Ice-Age Floods Features in the Vicinity of the Pasco Basin and the Hanford Reach National Monument, 23 pp.

Fedstats, 2007, Federal government official statistical webpage
<http://www.fedstats.gov/qf/states/53/53005.html>

Johnson, A., 2006, Chlorinated Pesticides, PCBs, and Dioxins in Yakima River Fish - 2006: Assessing Progress Toward TMDL Targets and Updating the Fish Consumption Advisory, Washington State Department of Ecology Environmental Assessment Program , 32 pp.

Monster, 2005, Monster Career Advise – Salary Wizard 2002 – 2007 <http://salary.monster.com/>

Benton Clean Air Authority, 2007, Official Website <http://www.bcaa.net/index.htm>

VIII. Attachments: (see accompanying file)

Attachment 1: General Location map of the proposed Benton City Community Pit, Benton City, WA.

Attachment 2: Site Map - USGS 7.5 Minute Series (1:24,000)

Attachment 3: Aerial photograph Imagery of the Benton City Pit Site

Attachment 4: Master Title Plat of the Benton City Community Pit area showing ownership

Attachment 5: Three-dimensional Computerized Model (“Surfer” software) of the Benton City Community Pit Federal Parcel - Original Surface

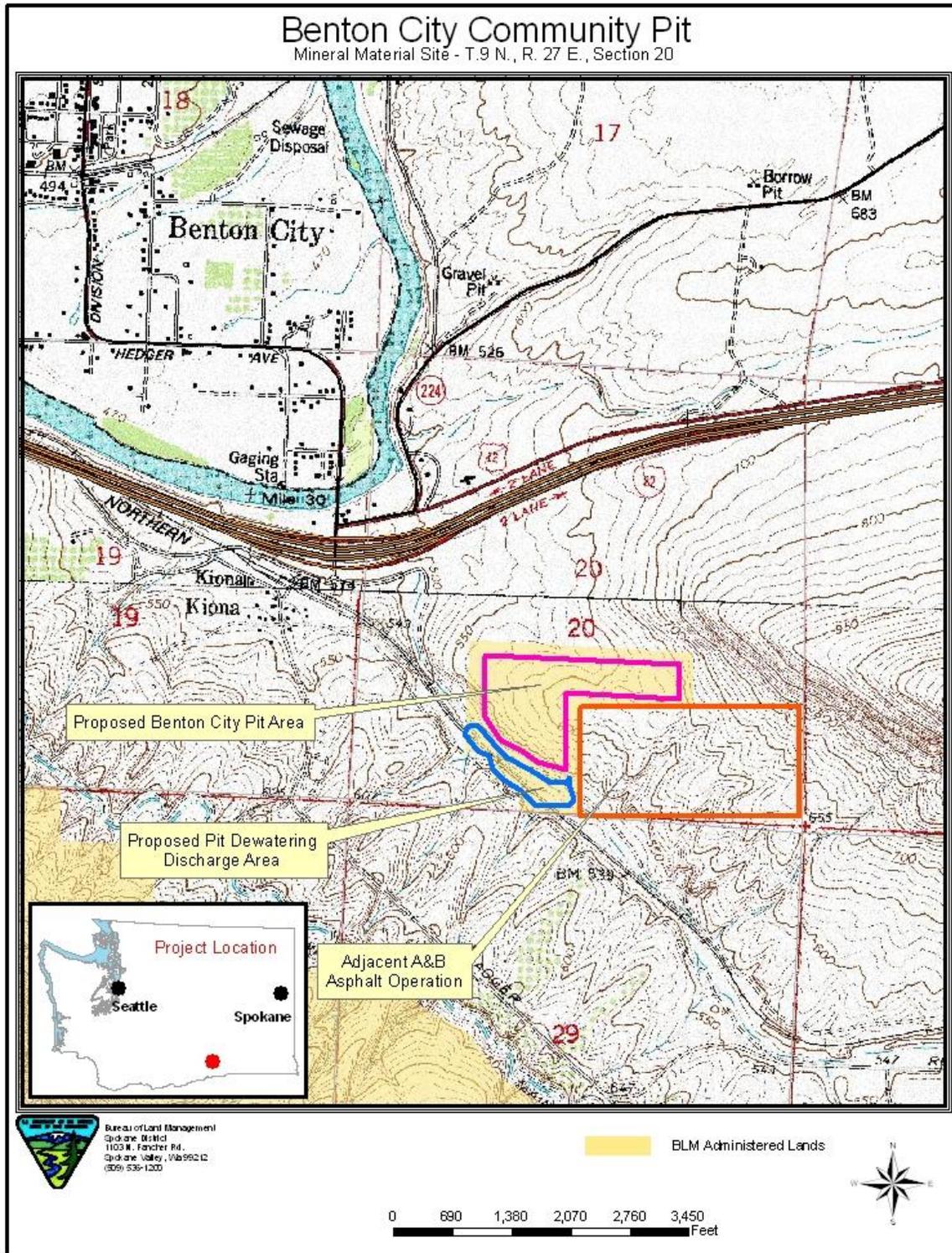
Attachment 6: Three-dimensional Computerized Model (“Surfer” software) of the fully developed Benton City Community Pit

Attachment 7: Photograph of proposed pit parcel (looking to the northwest)

Attachment 8: Public comments received and responded to in EA.

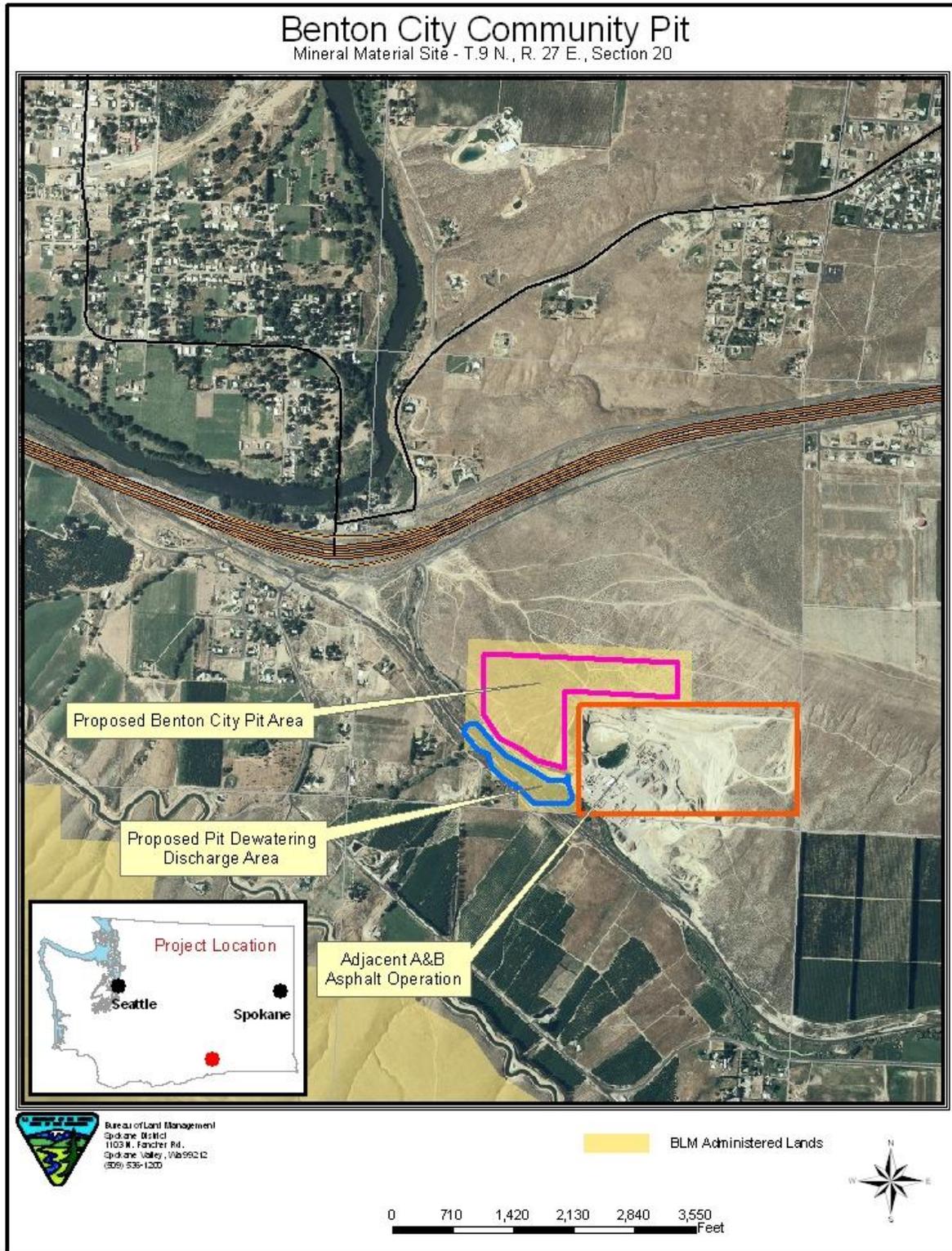
Attachment 2

Site Map - USGS 7.5 Minute Series (1:24,000)



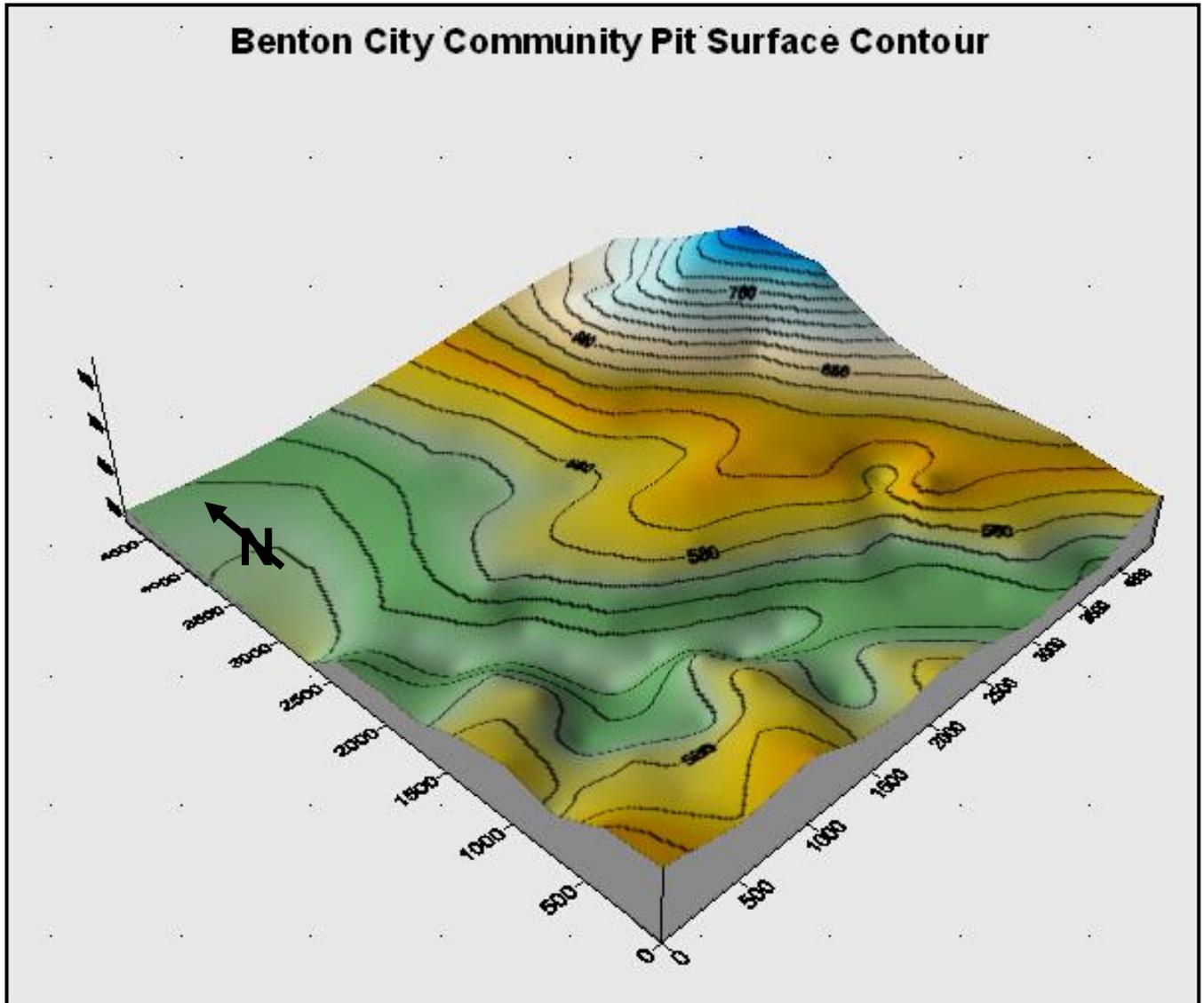
Attachment 3

Aerial photograph Imagery of the Benton City Pit Site



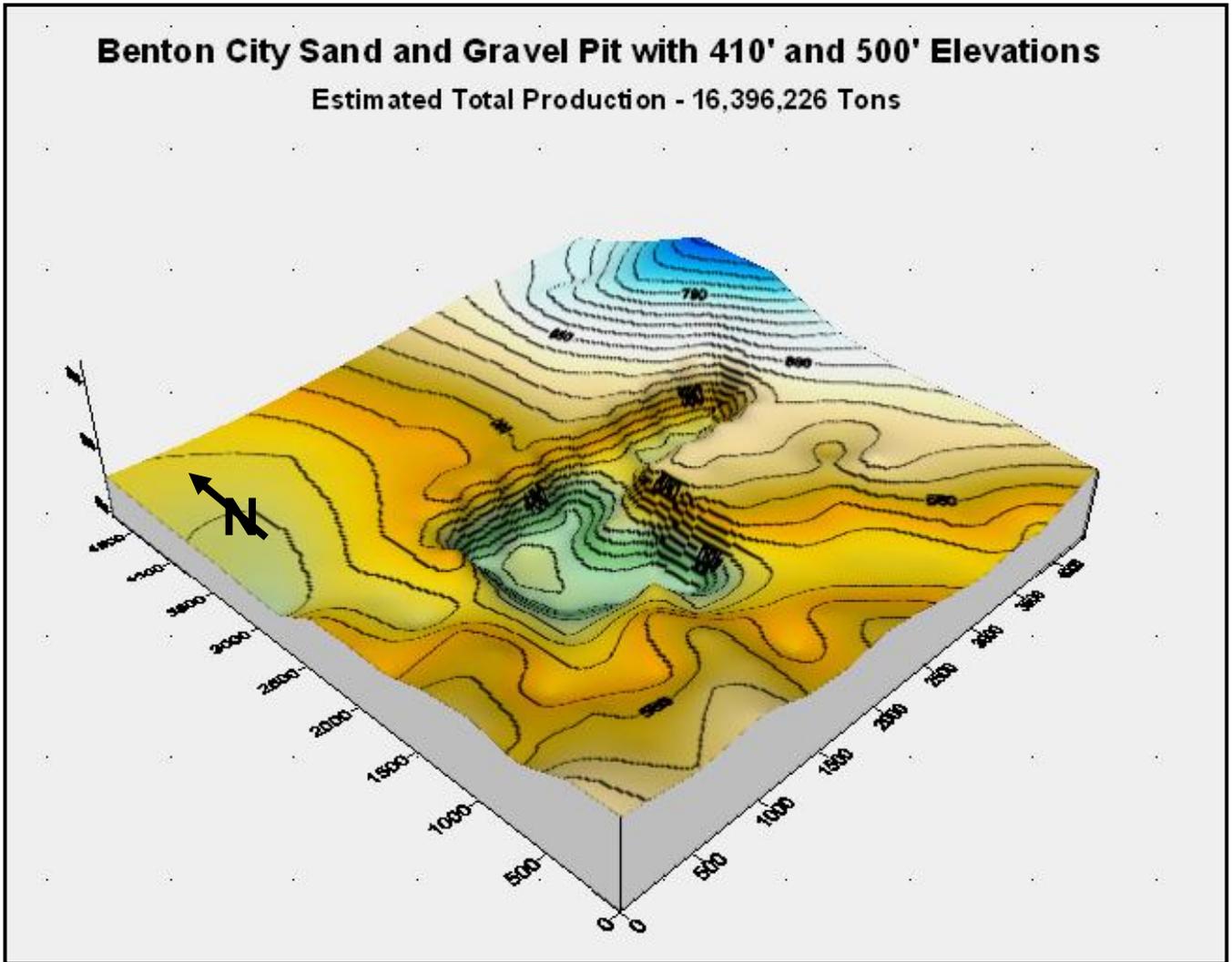
Attachment 5

Three-dimensional Computerized Model (“Surfer” software)
of Site Surface



Attachment 6

Three-dimensional Computerized Model (“Surfer” software)
of Proposed Pit



Attachment 7

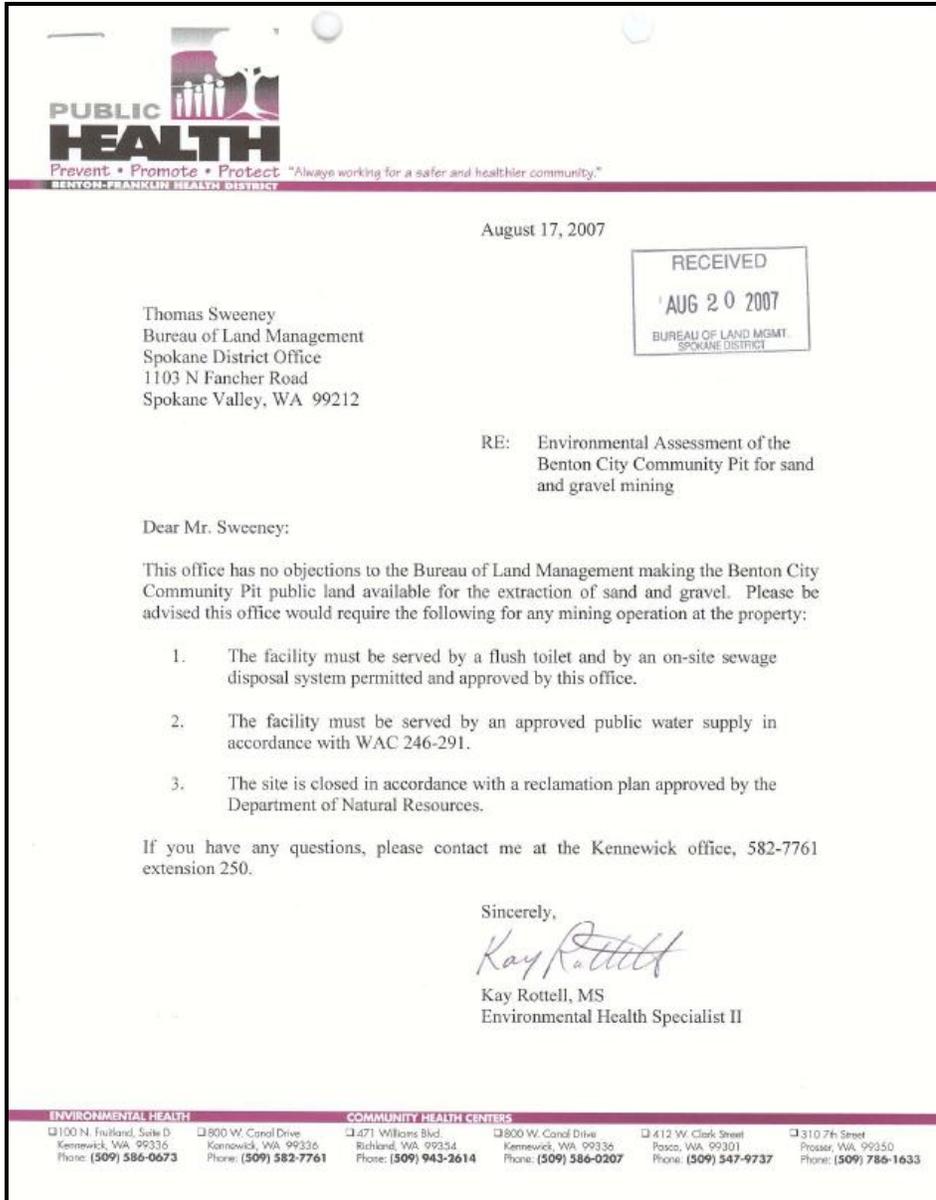
Photograph of proposed Benton City Mine Site (looking to the northwest)



Attachment 8

**Response to Public Comment on Benton City Community Pit
December 27, 2007**

Public Comment #1: Kay Rottell Franklin County Health



BLM Response to Comment:

BLM will direct the successful bidder to develop facilities at this site, in accordance with applicable regulations (CFR 43 3601.41 and CFR 43 3601.43), including septic facilities and water supply systems. BLM will require the successful bidder for this resource to work closely with the Benton-Franklin Health District to develop all required facilities.

This operation will be developed solely on Federal land, therefore, mine planning, closure and reclamation will be directed by Federal Surface Management Regulations (43 CFR 3603.22 b).

Public Comment #2: Robin Priddy, Benton County Air Authority



"Robin Priddy"
<rpri@bcaa.net>
08/27/2007 03:48 PM

To <Thomas_Sweeney@blm.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject: Benton City Community Pit

History:  This message has been replied to.

Tom,

BCAA received the request for comments and has the following -

1. Rock Crushing operations typically fall under the New Source Performance Standards (NSPS)
<http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=51b73339aaec21de3bbf15eb3356e054&rqn=div6&view=text&node=40:6.0.1.1.1.77&idno=40>
Here's the regulation; and if NSPS applies, a permit is required.
2. If anticipated emissions are over the de minimis threshold in WAC 173-400-110(5) a permit is required. The emission rates for crushing activities can be found in the AP-42
<http://www.epa.gov/ttn/chief/ap42/ch11/index.html>
is the link for these emission factors.

I'll be happy to help sort out whatever permitting is needed, crushing operations are typically quite straightforward. The other aspect of air quality that the BCAA looks after is fugitive dust from operations and vehicle traffic; that is governed in WAC 173-400-040. Typically dust suppression is done with water, chemicals, using gravel, etc. Again BCAA can provide guidance.

In the past the neighboring pit mentioned in the EIS has caused some troublesome dust impact to Kiona and neighboring properties. BCAA has an enforcement action with them in 2005 and since they are doing much much better.

Thanks a lot,

Robin

Robin Priddy
Benton Clean Air Authority
Air Quality Engineer

BLM Response to Comment:

This project is situated completely on Federal land and will be appropriately evaluated in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. BLM will direct the successful bidder to develop facilities at this site, in accordance with applicable regulations (CFR 43 3601.41 and CFR 43 3601.43). BLM will direct the successful bidder to comply with all Benton Clean Air Authority regulations. BLM will require the operator to meet regulatory requirements and obtain all required permits.



August 28, 2007

Bureau of Land Management
Spokane District Office
Attn: Thomas Sweeney
1103 N. Fancher Road
Spokane, WA 99212-1275

RE: **Environment Assessment Number OR-135-05-EA-013, 72.5 Acres in Benton County Washington – Sand and Gravel Mining**

Dear Mr. Sweeney:

I would like to comment on your proposed sand and gravel mining operations in Benton County.

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) owns property adjacent to your proposed mine site, next to the freeway I-82. DNR has been working with Benton City to develop this property/area for light industrial/commercial uses, IE: restaurants, motels, wineries etc. To facilitate this process, DNR sold a 5 acre tract of land to Benton City.

In general, mining and commercial operations do not mix well on adjacent properties. DNR believes expanding the current mining operations onto your lands will greatly limit or eliminate future commercial development on adjacent properties due to the following reasons:

1. Visual aspects of a mining operation adjacent to a commercial zone.
2. Mining and Construction noise as the pit expands towards the interchange.
3. Dust generated by mining operations, especially as the mine expands towards the interchange.
4. Stigma associated with locating motels/restaurants next to a mining operation.
5. Adverse impacts of heavy truck traffic mixing with highway commercial traffic.

Consequently, DNR is requesting BLM reconsider permitting their property for current mining operations in this area.

If BLM does not reconsider and allows mining on their lands, DNR requests a 50 foot set-back from our property line to ensure your operation won't encroach upon DNR.



Sand and Gravel Mining – OR-135-05-EA-013
Page Two

property in the future. In addition, DNR also requests BLM installs a landscaping barrier, including trees, shrubs, and grasses, be placed as a visual break that would also double as a dust and noise barrier

Please contact me at (509) 531-7418 to further discuss your operations and DNR's concerns.

Sincerely,



Mark Bohnet
Snake River District Manager
Southeast Region

c: Milton Johnston, Assistant Region Manager
Gale Allen, Commercial Lands Manager
Chad Unland, Gravel Sales and Leasing Specialist
City of Benton City
Benton County Planning Department

BLM Response to Comment:

Mr. Bohnet makes several points which are addressed individually here.

1. Current estimated visual impacts resulting from development of this operation are discussed in the EA in section III. Affected Environment – Visual Resources part H. (page 8) and in section IV. Environmental Impacts – Visual Resources (page 11). As discussed there, short term visual aspects of a mining operation adjacent to a commercial zone should be minimal because no commercial development currently exists in or adjacent to the subject parcel. Current mining at the A&B Asphalt sand and gravel mine directly south of the proposed pit has little if any effect on commercial development along the freeway interchange located near Benton City. Visual barriers and earthen berms will be required in the successful bidders Plan of Operations / Reclamation Plan, to help conceal mining activities. Long term visual aspects of the proposed mining and subsequent reclamation efforts should be very positive. Pit slopes will be reclaimed concurrent with mining, beginning at the crest of the pit and proceeding downward with mining. Final pit slopes will be designed near 2:1 (2 horizontal to 1 vertical) in steepness and will be contoured and re-vegetated with native plants. Upon closure, the site will contain a sculpted pit-bottom lake designed to enhance wildlife habitat and provide for human recreation. The resulting site should have a positive impact to future surrounding lands, community development and quality of living.

2. Mining and construction noise impacts resulting from development of this operation are discussed in the EA under the required mitigations – third bullet (page 5).

Operational hours at the pit would be limited to daytime and most operations would quickly be established below grade to minimize noise impacts on the surrounding areas.

No commercial development currently exists on or adjacent to the subject parcel. Increased mining and construction noise impacts at the interchange, as the pit develops, would be minimal. The proposed pit crest would only advance an additional 900 feet toward the freeway from the current A&B Asphalt pit. This would leave a 1,400 foot buffer between the north crest of the proposed pit and the freeway. The busy freeway produces its own, significant background noise and would mask any distant mining operational noise coming from the proposed operation. Mining on the parcel will be developed below grade as soon as possible inside the developing pit to reduce visual impacts and reduce sound projection. Sound barriers and earthen berms will be used to further reduce noise.

3. Dust generation is discussed in several sections of the EA, including:
 - A. Page 5 paragraph 2 – addresses water sprays and sources of dust.
 - B. Page 5 under required mitigation measures bullet # 5 addressing all dust generating activities.
 - C. Page 7 under Affected Environment part B – Air Quality.
 - D. Page 10 under Environmental Impacts part A. – Air Quality and
 - E. Page 13 under Environmental Impacts part C. - Cumulative Impacts.

Development of the site will be controlled by BLM. The successful bidder for the resource would be required by BLM to comply with Benton County Air Authority regulations. The company would have to meet applicable air quality standards through proven dust abatement procedures. Similar mining at the A&B Asphalt operation, directly south of this proposed pit, is in compliance with Benton County Air Authority standards and operates successfully.

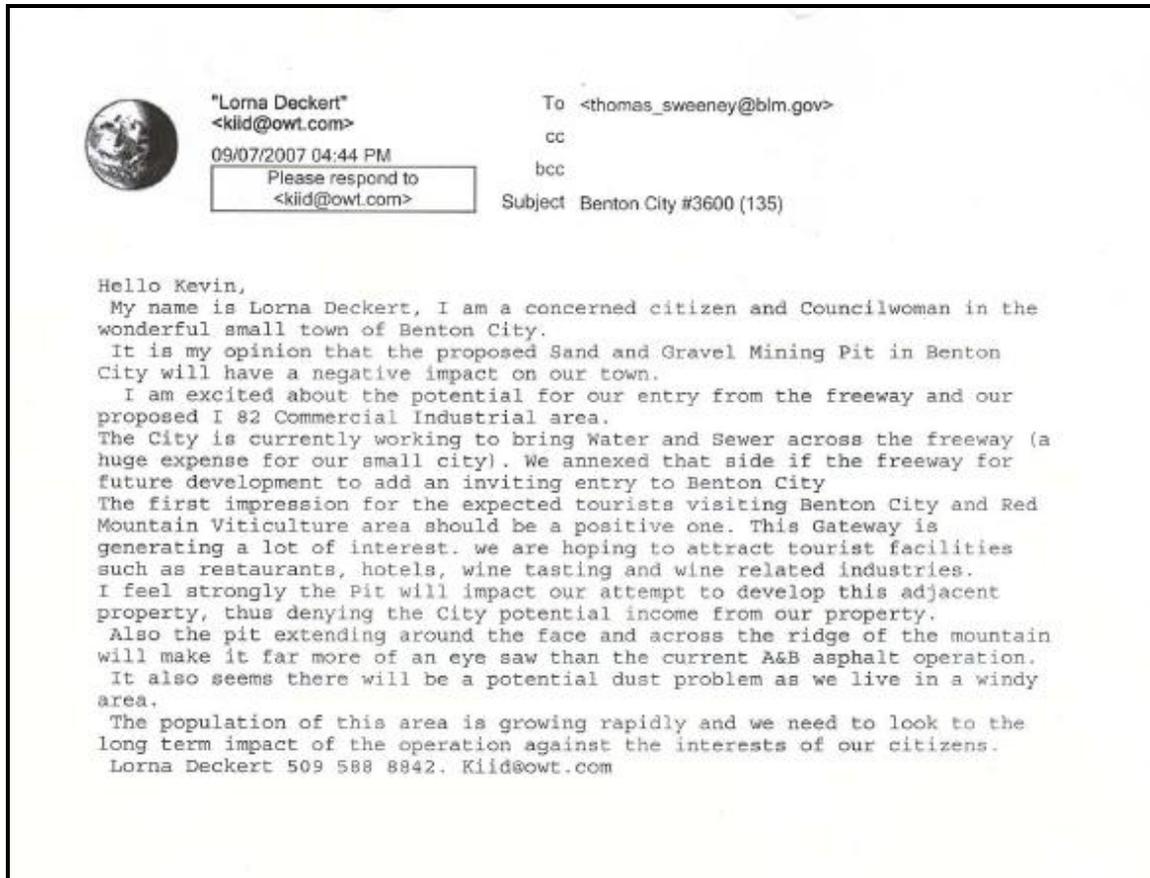
4. Currently there are no motels or restaurants situated on or adjacent to this Federal parcel. Long term, the mining operation and proposed reclamation will create an environment that should enhance recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, and create an attraction for the location of commercial facilities. See visual impacts section #1 above.

5. Increased traffic is discussed in the EA in section III. Affected Environment part A. – General Setting (page 6) and in part N. – Transportation (page 9). Traffic is also discussed in the EA in section IV. Environmental Impacts – Transportation (page 12) and under part C. – Cumulative Impacts (page 13).

Increased traffic of about 60 trucks per day (fewer if larger trucks are used) from the Benton City Pit to the freeway entrance would roughly double the current A&B Asphalt traffic during peak production from both operations during the interim period when both A&B Asphalt and the successful bidder for the Benton City Community Pit operate simultaneously. If A&B Asphalt is the successful bidder, truck traffic will remain about the same as it is now. The distance from the BLM property boundary to the freeway on-ramp is about 2,800 feet, consisting mostly of a paved, gravel pit access road. Upon depletion of the A&B Asphalt mining resource, project traffic from the proposed pit will reduce back to roughly the same levels (60 trucks per day) as when A&B Asphalt operated alone. BLM will work with Benton City and the successful mining company to promote installation of traffic signals and road improvements designed to reduce traffic congestion in this area. Direct freeway on and off-ramp access will help to minimize traffic congestion near the proposed mine.

Mr. Bohnet also requests a 50 foot setback from the property line to ensure that operations will not encroach on neighboring lands. As discussed in the EA in section II. Proposed Action part A. - Description of the Proposed Action (page 3), BLM will direct the successful bidder to develop an acceptable mine plan that will maximize resource recovery while maintaining the integrity of local property boundaries. Ultimately, the entire pit will be reclaimed with a fifty foot property setback and pit wall slopes of about 2:1 (2 horizontal to 1 vertical), capable of supporting enhanced reclamation efforts.

Public Comment #4: Lorna Deckert, Resident and City Councilwoman



BLM Response to Comment:

BLM believes that development of this site will have many positive effects for the local community. These benefits would include increased job opportunities for local families, increased tax revenues for local government, increased local business and revenues (i.e. food, lodging, services) and assurance of a reasonably priced mineral materials source for future community development. Ms. Deckert is correct in her statement that this area is growing rapidly. Each new home will require about 400 tons of sand and gravel for completion. A one lane-mile of a four lane interstate highway will require about 38,000 tons of sand and gravel to complete and about 15,000 tons of aggregate will be needed for each average sized school or hospital. Average annual per capita consumption of aggregates in the United States is currently about 10 tons.

Please refer to the response to Public Comment #3 regarding impacts to the development of adjacent lands. BLM intends to have this operation developed in a thoughtful, conscientious manner and expects final reclamation landscapes to be an asset to the community and future development in the area.

Public Comment #5: Doug Migas, Old Castle Materials (email)

 "Migas, Doug"
<dmigas@oldcastlematerials.com>
09/13/2007 08:26 AM

To <thomas_sweeney@blm.gov>
cc
Subject Benton City Pit

Your agency has estimated 500,000 tons of material to be produced out of the Benton City pit if it is developed. That is a lot of material, especially having an existing operating pit right next door. I am curious how you arrived @ the 500,000 tons per year.

Doug Migas

 Thomas Sweeney/SPFO/OR/BLM/DOI
09/14/2007 09:19 AM

To "Migas, Doug" <dmigas@oldcastlematerials.com>
cc James Scott Pavey/SPFO/OR/BLM/DOI@BLM
bcc
Subject Re: Benton City Pit

Doug, the existing pit you refer to in your email (A&B Asphalt) currently supplies the community with rock sales of nearly 400,000 tons of material annually. The A&B operation is situated on a limited size parcel that cannot continue operation at this level forever. Rock sources for the tri-cities area are also limited and reducing due to residential encroachment and exhaustion of current mineral material pits. Our development profile for the Benton City Community Pit operation is similar to that of the A&B operation. We plan to have the successful bidder for this resource start out at lower production rates initially during the development phase while A&B is still in production at their adjacent site, then increase production to fill the current need and future expanded needs of the local residents. The current environmental assessment (EA) was written to reflect the higher rate so we could evaluate the impacts of the larger option. If additional market demand develops, we may analyze the effect of increasing production from the proposed pit.

Based on your email address, I suspect that you are well aware of the benefits of and demand for mineral material resources. If you are not, the fact is that we all use lots of sand and gravel for nearly every part of our lives. Construction of a single family home uses nearly 400 tons of aggregate. Roads, concrete, asphalt, fill material, paper production, etc. all uses mineral materials at an astonishing rate. Included below is the web address for an aggregate association which provides some eye opening statistics on mineral material production and use. We feel that a reliable supply of mineral materials is crucial for the Benton City area to thrive. This proposed pit is designed to assure that mineral materials will be available in the future.

<http://www.nssga.org/pdf/50facts.pdf>

If I can be of further help, don't hesitate to write or call.

Thanks

Thomas M. (Mike) Sweeney LPG, LPHG, LPEG,
Border Resource Area, Spokane District
Phone # 509.536.1283

BLM Response to Comment:

See BLM's (Thomas Sweeney's) response email above.

Public Comment #6: Walter Horning, A&B Asphalt

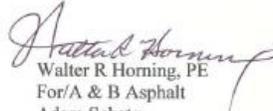


COMMENTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Environmental Assessment No OR-135-05-EA-013
BLM Resource Area - - Border
Benton County
SE 1/4 SW 1/4 Sec 20 T 9 N R 27 E
Approximately 72.5 acres

1.
This is a good plan to make a natural resource (sand & gravel) available to the public to be utilized for construction with the foresight to have a completely reclaimed site for a recreation area.
2.
The utilization of the sand and gravel fulfills an economic need by provided needed employment in the area which in turn adds dollars to the tax base. The royalty collected for this sand and gravel also supplies needed funds to manage other governmental needs.
3.
The completed (reclaimed) site provides a further use as a recreational area with places for rest area, picnicking, viewing wildlife, hiking, as well as family outings with a lake for swimming. It also reduces or discourages the practice of illegal dumping and vandalism. The facility will also provide a safe haven for small animals – deer, song birds, water fowl, and other creatures that are struggling to find food, water and shelter in a hostile environment.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal.


Walter R Horning, PE
For/A & B Asphalt
Adam Schatz

BLM Response to Comment:

Thank you for your comment.

Public Comment #7: Richard Delorme, Benton City Chamber of Commerce

September 22, 2007

Richard Delorme
1202 12th Street
Benton City, Washington

BLM – Spokane District Office
1103 North Francher
Spokane, WA 99212

Subject: *BLM Environmental Assessment OR-135-05-EA-013: Development of, and Issuance of Competitive Mineral Material Sales from, a Benton City Community Pit (Federal Parcel)*

It is my opinion that Environmental Assessment OR-135-05-EA-013 did not address many social and economic impacts on the Benton City community. The Wine Industry in the greater Benton City area has seen explosive growth with wine tourist spending approximately \$10 million dollars in the community last year (see Red Mountain AVA site master plan study 2007). The State of Washington estimates that the number of tourist visiting Benton City will grow to 1.5 million per annum with an estimated 150 - 300 million dollar impact on our local economy. To support the growing wine tourist industry, the City of Benton City annexed property surrounding the Benton City – West Richland interchange. It is the stated intention of the city to developing the new annexation as commercial property. The city has undergone a six year annexation process and has spent three year obtaining the proper permits from the Departments of Ecology, Transportation, and Fish and Wildlife to extend water and sewer lines to support the newly annexed property. At the time of the annexation A&B Asphalt supported the city and requested to be annexed into the City. This impact statement characterization of the general setting (page 5) and its assessment of adjacent land values is inaccurate and out of date. Thus the impact statement fails to address the proposed community gravel pit on the City of Benton City's and adjacent land owners' ongoing development.

Environmental Assessment OR-135-05-EA-013 states on page 7 that the "*Interstate 82 which is located to the north of the parcel, may have minor distant views of the pit surface area*". This statement is totally understated. The proposed area is highly visible to south bound travelers and can be seen for several miles; the view of north bound travelers is blocked by the hill until they approach the interchange. At the interchange the proposed "Benton City Community Gravel Pit" would dominate the view. Furthermore the proposed pit will remove a low ridge that currently hides A&B Asphalts gravel pit thus the real view would be of a much larger pit. The 2007 Red Mountain AVA site master plan study found that largest grow population of wine tourist are from west side of the state. If the proposed mine is developed as planned these tourist will be welcomed to Benton City by a huge unappealing open pit mine and most likely will drive on to other interchanges. The Chamber of Commerce has been informed that the adjacent property owners consider a gravel pit to be incompatible with existing commercial development plans. At least one land owner has stated that they will cancel existing

development plans if the proposed Benton City Community Pit is developed. Thus the proposed pit mine as proposed endangers the current wine tourist industry and most likely will have a net negative impact on the local economy.

The annexation and planning of the I-82 intersection has cost the City of Benton City \$125,148.01 (City budgets 2000-2006). This year (2007) the City of Benton City approved the engineering plans to extend water and sewer lines across river and the competitive bid process are under way the estimated cost is \$1.5 million. This phase 1, water and sewer line project is slated for completion next year. Furthermore, the City of Benton City has allocated several hundred thousand dollars in matching funds with the State of Washington towards a rail road underpass and other road improvements in the annexation. The City of Benton City has a large capital investment in the area surrounding the proposed Community Gravel Pit. Therefore if the adjacent commercial development is cancelled, the City of Benton City would have a relatively huge liability with no potential revenue to recovery the expense. The proposed Benton City Community Pit would only provide revenue to the City of Benton City if the point of Sale of the mine products is Benton City. Since Benton City is a relatively low income community (LMI greater than 52%) there could be a long term impact on the cities solvency.

I fully the recognizes the importance of providing building material to the Tri-cities area and the importance the proposed gravel pit has to the 100+ employees of A&B Asphalt. However as proposed the "Benton City Community Gravel Pit" is in conflict with and will have a negative impact on the growing wine tourist industry. Given the ongoing project expenses of the City of Benton City, the current development plans of adjacent property owners and current value of A&B Asphalt; I request that the BLM-Spokane District Office seek an accommodation of these apparently conflicting interests. I suggest that the possibility that a park with a screen of fast growing evergreens could be developed to hide the mining area. This proposal would not be difficult to explore as the County Park and Recreation Department or a private landscape architect could be employed to draft a plan at minimal expense. I further propose a meeting of the appropriate government officials to examine this and other possible remediation proposals. This intergovernmental meeting could be followed by a public open meeting to allow public comments.

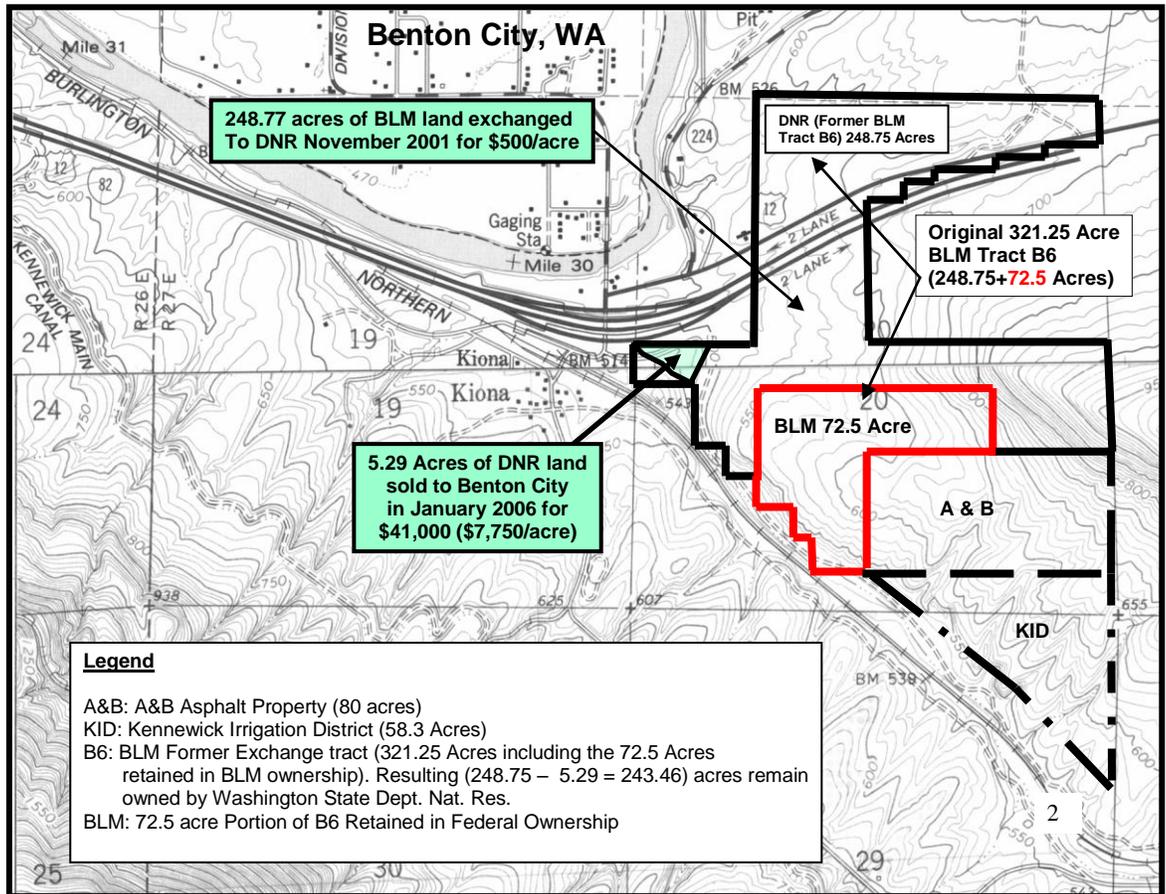
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Respectfully;

Richard Delorme
Vice President – Benton City Chamber of Commerce
Treasure – Benton City Economic Development Council

BLM Response to Comment:

The above comments imply that development of the proposed Benton City Community Pit would adversely affect visual character of the area. Benton City has invested about \$41,000 in purchasing a 5 acre parcel on the south side of the adjacent freeway (I-82) (see attached map). The parcel is sandwiched between the active A&B Asphalt mine haul road, Interstate Highway 82 and the active Burlington Northern multi-track railroad. Under the proposed action, mine planning and regulation for the Benton City Pit will be accomplished thoughtfully and with consideration to the surrounding property owners, businesses, and local economy. Measures will be initiated to mitigate visual, traffic and air quality impacts (see BLM's response to Public Comment #3 above and the EA).



Active mining at the pit site will be obscured as quickly as possible by earthen berms, vegetative screens and by locating mining and processing activities down in the pit. Mining and operational noise would be masked by installation of soil stockpiles, protective and visual barriers. Sequential reclamation would be concurrent with mining so that the upper portions of the pit would be reclaimed quickly as mining continues at depth. Final reclamation in the lower portions of the pit will result in a land parcel that is an asset to the community that would compliment and enhance the described commercial developments on adjacent lands, by creating water recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, and appealing vistas of the resulting pit lake.

Public Comment #8: Phil Meese, Benton County Planning

Benton County Planning/Building Department

Terry A. Marden, Director

PLANNING
Planning Annex
P.O. Box 910, 1002 Dudley Avenue
Prosser WA 99350
Prosser Office: (509) 786-6612
From Tri-Cities: (509) 738-3088
Fax: (509) 786-6628

BUILDING
Kennewick Annex
5600 W. Canal Drive, Suite C 105A
Kennewick WA 99336
Tri-Cities Office: (509) 735-3500
From Prosser: (509) 786-6622
Fax: (509) 736-2732

September 26, 2007



United States Department of Interior
Bureau of Land Management
ATTN: Thomas Sweeney
Spokane District Office
1103 N. Fancher Road
Spokane Valley, Washington 99212-1275

Subject: OR-135-05-EA-013

Dear Mr. Sweeney:

Following are comments from the Benton County Planning Department on BLM's Environmental Assessment for an additional 72.5 acres of open pit mining adjacent to the existing A&B Asphalt mine in Benton City. Our information from the City of Benton City is that the comment period on the EA has been extended to September 26, 2007. This letter will be transmitted by email to Thomas.Sweeney@blm.gov with a mailed hard copy to follow.

It is our recommendation that the EA OR 135-05-EA-013 be withdrawn because it is factually incorrect relative to existing conditions and does not adequately address significant land use issues and conflicts raised by the proposal. It is recommended that additional environmental analyses for the issues listed below be accomplished to determine if the proposed use can be in any way modified to avoid or mitigate impacts.

Water Quality: Item C., page 6 of the EA:

The discussion of water quality within the EA seems to be an inaccurate representation of the facts on the ground. It is incorrect to state that only seasonal water flows from winter rains and snow melt occur in the drainage that borders the project site to the west, and that "No discharge will occur from the proposed mine into the Yakima River (EA, page 6)." Surface and/or subsurface seasonal flows within the drainage persist for most if not all of the year - from winter rains and snow melt; from subsurface flows in Badger Canyon, from A&B operations; and from irrigation return flow, the source of which is a federal water project (Kennewick Irrigation District). The drainage does have water-flow connectivity to the Yakima river (surface flow is piped under the freeway, daylights in a deep ravine to the east and behind the Conoco station at the interchange, is piped again under Kennedy Road and enters the Yakima river approximately 100' downstream of the Benton City bridge. If the mine operation uses the drainage-way as a pit dewatering area, it is difficult to see how water from the operation would not enter the Yakima River. The Yakima River has two ESA listed species, Mid-Columbia Steelhead and Bull trout. It is not clear how the water quality impacts from this proposal are exempt from the Clean water Act.

Water Supply

Is the new water well dependent on Yakima Basin water supply? If so is a new water right required? If so is the new water right exempt from the existing State moratorium on new groundwater rights in the Yakima Basin?

Wetlands and Aquatic Resources

The USFWS wetland maps (circa 1982) that the County and other jurisdictions use for regulating impacts to protect Critical Areas under GMA shows a linear series of Palustrine Emergent wetlands within the area of A&B's current operation and within the area of the proposed expansion. Field observation this month verifies the map data, and that the wetlands suffer degradation from unauthorized intrusion. The water creating these wetlands is from the sources identified above under the heading Water Quality. It is unlikely that the sole source of this water is from A&B asphalt's pit watering because water exists upstream of the A&B operation. The County had, and the City now has (now that the land is annexed) regulatory responsibility for protection of these wetlands under the WA State Growth Management Act (GMA). In a 1995 application for a Special Use Permit (SP 95-3- A & B Asphalt), A&B was granted a special use permit with the condition that a 100' buffer be maintained between its operations and the drainage. In an August 2002 Special Permit SP 02-09, condition #7 states that "all structures and equipment used for this proposal shall be placed at least 100' from the existing drainage-way. No materials used in the process or waste material produced by the process shall be allowed to flow into the drainage way". Under GMA wetlands must be protected. In contrast, the proposed action would convert the wetlands to an industrial use. Given that the nearest upslope water source is from a federal project an analysis of the hydrogeology in the drainage watershed should be accomplished to determine if the waters in the drainage/ wetlands are jurisdictional.

Wildlife, page 9

The comment that "sufficient shrub-steppe habitat is available at adjacent local sites" is not a valid comment relative to biology in general, and wildlife impacts of the proposal. The project would in fact result in an unmitigated net loss of natural habitat and therefore biological productivity, perhaps mitigated in the long term by reclamation of the existing A&B site, but the EA doesn't say that. The BLM lands to the west on the Horse Heaven and those of the project site are two distinct microclimates. The BLM lands on the Horse heaven slopes are a bunchgrass only habitat, almost entirely devoid of the sage over-story and aquatic resources that characterizes the diversity of vegetative cover and biology on the project site. Regionally the cumulative loss of sage habitat due to State DNR leases for agriculture and urban expansion is significant. Relative to the drainage and wetland targeted for pit water, the EA's mention of "clouded water" means water laden with fines, which is not beneficial to aquatic organisms.

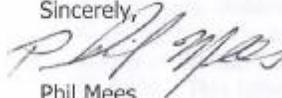
Significant Land Use Conflicts: Preemption of City Economic and Land use Objectives

The County recently added the area that includes the mining proposal to Benton City's urban growth area so that the City could realize revenues from interchange related commercial and light industrial development. The City of Benton City's Land Use Map of its comprehensive plan shows the area immediately adjacent to the mining proposal to be designated Light Industrial and Commercial. The EA discusses only potential impacts and mitigations for the Light Industrial use. The EA states that the mining operation is compatible with light industrial uses, however it does so without an obvious examination of the uses allowed in the City's Light

Industrial zoning district to see what uses are allowed. For example, laboratories and office space are allowed uses within the district. Relative to the Commercial uses, the city is eager that lodging and restaurant facilities may be constructed as visitor-serving facilities related to the Red Mountain AVA. Neither the office, laboratory or the lodging and restaurant uses would be compatible with the noise, dust, vibration, and heavy truck traffic that comes from an adjacent heavy industrial operation that is the proposed mining operation. Additionally the proposed project is adjacent to and immediately upwind of State DNR land for which DNR is considering vineyard and wineries as a potential use consistent with the current trend of those uses within the area of Red Mountain American Viticulture Area. Even a small amount of dust from the mining operation on vineyard grapes is a serious problem, and the mining operation with its heavy truck traffic is not compatible with the ambience required for wineries.

The area including the proposed project site is the only interchange land available to the city for significant revenue generating commercial and light industrial uses. The City is currently actively planning and seeking permits and funding to extend municipal sewer and water across the Yakima River for development of this area. The heavy industrial nature of the BLM proposal has the potential to significantly narrow the range of uses that would be attractive to future developers for this area, thereby constraining and preempting the realization by the City of its economic and land use objectives for this area.

Sincerely,



Phil Mees
Senior Planner, Long Range

cc: Kathy Reed Washington State Department of Ecology
Mayor Bryan Robinson, City of Benton City
Lloyd Carnahan, Mayor pro-tem City of Benton City
Washington State Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
Gale Allen, Washington State Department of Natural Resources

BLM Response to Comment:

Water Quality:

No contaminants which are harmful to humans or wildlife would be discharged into the infiltration pond situated south of the Benton Community Pit during the dewatering process as discussed in the EA, section IV. Environmental Impacts part A. – Wildlife (page 11). Therefore, no contaminants will enter the local surface or groundwater systems or be carried into the Yakima River. The infiltration pond is situated in a runoff channel identified on the U.S. Geological Survey map of the area as an “intermittent stream”, which by definition, means “a stream, or reach of a stream that flows only at certain times of the year”. On March 6, 2008 a meeting was held in Benton City between BLM, DNR and Benton City Officials. During that meeting Lloyd Carnahan, Mayor and longtime resident of Benton City, confirmed that this stream channel has never experienced continuous flow until the orchards began directing irrigation runoff back into it.

A&B Asphalt is a sand/gravel mine and processing facility situated adjacent to, and south of, the proposed Benton City Pit operation. A&B built, and actively uses a water impoundment area, constructed on BLM property, within the adjacent drainage for pit dewatering infiltration into the local groundwater system. The A&B Asphalt operation has been permitted by and appears to be acceptable to Benton County. If Benton County

feels that the current infiltration facility is not suitable, they should work with A&B Asphalt to correct any deficiencies.

On April 2, 2008, BLM collected two sediment and one water quality samples from the stream and pond areas down gradient of the A&B Asphalt operations. No contaminants of concern were noted in the analyses of these samples.

During most of the mining life at the proposed Benton City Community Pit there will be no water present in the pit and therefore no need to pump uncontaminated water into the existing groundwater infiltration pond described above. Toward the end of the proposed operation, after groundwater is encountered in the lower portions of the pit, uncontaminated groundwater from the pit would be pumped into the infiltration pond that is currently acceptable to Benton County. By that time, A&B Asphalt operation should have exhausted their mineral material resource and the proposed Benton City Community Pit operation will simply continue the existing groundwater recharge practice currently accepted by Benton County. Water will be pumped from the pit area, located approximately 500 feet north, where it will be contained in the infiltration pond and allowed to recharge back into the same local groundwater system from which it was extracted. This effort will maintain the artificially created wetlands habitat in the adjacent drainage until mining of the Benton City Community Pit is complete. Final reclamation of the pit area and establishment of a suitable wetland habitat around the pit lake would then provide long term wildlife habitat after the artificial wetland is allowed to revert back to an intermittent stream channel.

Water discharged into the current infiltration pond impoundment facility by A&B Asphalt does not directly enter the Yakima River as surface runoff. The above described earthen dam, installed on Federal land in the adjacent drainage by A&B Asphalt, impounds uncontaminated pit dewatering and surface water flow in the intermittent stream channel. BLM realizes that there is a historic channel downstream of the A&B Asphalt impoundment, perhaps with piping modifications to carry downstream surface runoff water and perhaps influent groundwater from that area, toward the Yakima River. No contaminants will be allowed in any discharge water from the Benton City Pit operation.

Currently, there is an effort to acquire local water rights adjacent to the Yakima River in an attempt to use them to enhance flow volume and dilute concentrations of pesticides and fertilizers currently contaminating the river as a result of agriculture activity in the area. Any uncontaminated groundwater flow resulting from this proposed operation should be viewed as a benefit for the Yakima River.

BLM does not intend to allow the introduction of any contaminated water onto the surface or into the local groundwater systems as a result of mining at this site. Gravel rinse water discharged into settling ponds located within the pit would be soil clouded and subsequently allowed to settle. Pit dewatering or clarified settling pond water discharged into the impoundment facility would be clear or slightly sediment clouded. Discharge water will not contain toxic contaminants or have any negative impact on humans or animals.

Water Supply:

An operational water supply will be addressed in the detailed mine plan developed by the successful bidder under the guidance of BLM. A potable water well will be drilled on the property to service employee facilities. A potential source for potable and process

water is the new Benton City water system, which has been developed to serve the area south of Interstate 82. Alternative water sources include temporary or permanent purchase of water rights from local residents or farmers. Process water may also be available from the recharge pond located on a portion of this Federal parcel. Excess pit water from the A&B operation may also be available for use at the proposed operation.

Wetlands and Aquatic Resources:

The entire proposed operation, existing impoundment structure and recharge pond are located on Federal property. BLM is unaware of any authority under which Benton City can annex Federal property or regulate Federal land management.

Field observation referred to by this commenter that the artificial wetlands suffered degradation, appears to identify the unauthorized construction of a drainage ditch by A&B Asphalt. The ditch was situated on Federal property, north of and adjacent to, the A&B Asphalt access road. The ditch was constructed without authorization from BLM during a time when Benton County claims to have “had regulatory responsibility for protection of these wetlands”. It was discovered by BLM during routine inspections in the area and A&B Asphalt was subsequently required to fill and reclaim the site.

Similar to the A&B Asphalt operation, which the commenter identifies as having acquired special use permits from Benton County for the current operation, BLM does not intend to allow the successful bidder for the Benton City pit to construct buildings or place equipment within 100 feet of the drainage. BLM plans to include similar restriction in the mining/reclamation plan. Piping to transfer water into the recharge pond during the final mining stages of the pit would be allowed. Under this proposal and mine plan, the wetlands would not be converted into an industrial use as suggested by the commenter.

This section of wetlands was previously an intermittent stream bottom. A&B Asphalt artificially created the infiltration pond by construction of an impoundment in the stream channel and by pit dewatering from the A&B Asphalt operation. BLM does not intend to change the current (permitted?) use of the impoundment site, until the completion of mining from the Benton City Community Pit. At that time, final reclamation will provide an alternative wetlands area adjacent to the pit lake. Once the pit lake habitat is established and stable, pit dewatering would cease, the drainage impoundment would be removed (if deemed proper), and the drainage would be returned to its original flow regime.

Wildlife:

As noted at the bottom of page 11 in the EA, and under section IV. Environmental Impacts on page 10, BLM acknowledges that the use of 72.5 acres of shrub-steppe habitat in the pit area would be lost for the short term. This area is surrounded by state of Washington and private lands of similar character. Limited wildlife which may currently occupy the Federal parcel would be displaced to adjacent lands during the initial development phase of the Benton City project. This habitat would become available again as the upper pit slopes are reclaimed concurrent with mining. In the moderate term, habitat loss would be mitigated by sequential reclamation of the pit slopes, beginning in the upper slope areas and progressing downward as mining advances. Long term impacts from this project should be minimal. During the operational phase of the mine, approximately 62 acres of the initially disturbed ground would be seeded and planted with native species. A lake of about 10 acres would remain in the pit bottom.

The commenter asserts that the proposed operation would have significant negative impacts to sage habitat. He then continues, in the following paragraph of his comments, with promotion of Benton County's and City's Urban Growth plans for light industrial and vineyard development which will permanently destroy hundreds, if not thousands of acres of similar habitat. The logic of this argument is difficult to understand, as both of the latter alternatives would have significantly greater and permanent effects on local environmental conditions than the proposed mining operation and subsequent reclamation. The proposed Red Mountain American Viticulture Area (AVA) would disturb over 4,000 acres. Cumulative effects that could be expected from this alternative urban growth plan would include, sheet-wash runoff from light industrial parking areas, access roads and highway construction, extensive vineyards, introduction of large quantities of agricultural pesticides, agricultural fugitive dust, emissions from tourist and farming vehicles, increased sewage and garbage disposal requirements, increased power consumption and increased water usage for watering monoculture agricultural crops.

Significant Land Use Conflicts:

BLM believes that city zoning, especially in the case of this recently annexed and undeveloped area adjacent to the Federal parcel, does not apply to, or control the Federal Government's ability to reasonable and thoughtful development of the Federal lands for the benefit of the American public. The Environmental Assessment completed for this project specifies that the "**outcome of this scenario** appears to be consistent with Benton City's proposal of a light industrial site which may eventually surround this location". Currently there is no light industrial industry in the area around or directly adjacent to this Federal parcel. A&B Asphalt is an adjacent and nearly identical heavy industrial mining operation to that which BLM proposes for the Federal parcel. BLM intends to concurrently contour and reclaim the Federal parcel so that it is compatible with the long term, light industrial concepts of the area. In addition, BLM intends to establish recreation, wildlife, and vista opportunities at this site for the benefit of the local community and the public at large.

BLM believes that this project would have significantly positive economic impacts on the community. It will provide mining and related community jobs, increase local employment diversity and supply needed tax base to support services and community development. In addition, this project will ensure a stable reasonably priced mineral materials supply for future community infrastructure development.