

DRAFT

**Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
DOI-BLM-CO-F020-2020-0024-EA**

Based on my review of the environmental assessment (EA) and supporting documents, I have determined that the proposed oil and gas lease sale would not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects from any alternative assessed or evaluated meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined by 43 CFR 1508.27, nor do they exceed those effects as described in the Royal Gorge Resource Area Resource Management Plan (RMP) or the Northeast Resource Area RMP (as amended in 1991) and Record of Decision (ROD). Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below.

Context:

Oil and gas leasing in the Royal Gorge Field Office includes all those federal fluid mineral resources in Colorado east of the Continental Divide, with the exception of the federal fluid mineral estate within the Kremmling and San Luis Valley Field Office boundaries. The parcels in the proposed action are in rural settings, in Weld and Las Animas Counties, mostly in cropland, grassland, and shrub/scrub. Weld and Las Animas Counties have both seen prior oil and gas development. The EA analyzes 43 lease parcels that will be included in the September 2020 lease sale. Certain aspects associated with the proposed lease parcels, such as air and water quality and energy development, have statewide and regional importance.

Intensity:

The following discussion is organized around the 10 significance criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27 and incorporated into resources and issues considered (includes supplemental authorities Appendix 1 H-1790-1), and supplemental instruction memoranda, acts, regulations and executive orders. The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal:

Impacts that may be beneficial and adverse:

There are no direct impacts to resources from the act of leasing. The EA identifies indirect impacts from leasing as a result of potential future impacts from development of those leases at the application for permit to drill (APD) stage. None of the environmental effects associated with offering the proposed lease parcels for sale, as discussed in detail in the EA, were determined to be significant, nor do the effects exceed those described in the governing RMPs.

Public health and safety:

If the parcels are sold and the leases enter into a development stage, public health or safety would be protected by lease stipulations and federal, state, and local health and safety regulations, and through conditions of approval imposed as required following site-specific analysis. As a result, impacts to public health and safety are not expected to be significant.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area:

The EA evaluated the area of the proposed lease sale and determined that no areas with unique characteristics such as wild and scenic rivers, prime or unique farmlands, areas of critical environmental concern, designated wilderness areas, or wilderness study areas were present.

Degree to which effects are likely to be highly controversial:

The lease sale, that is, the act of offering oil and gas parcels for lease, is not unique or unusual. Oil and gas leasing and post-lease development have been ongoing for many years. BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas. The environmental effects on the human environment are considered in the corresponding RMPs/Final Environmental Impact Statements (FEISs) and in the EA. Oil and gas exploration and drilling operations are regulated for health and safety through other agencies of local, state, and federal government. Should there be discovered risks, those agencies would act accordingly. The predicted effects on the human environment described in the EA are not highly uncertain, nor do they involve unique or unknown risks. The EA has analyzed and disclosed those relationships. The selected alternative is not expected to significantly affect the rate of change in those effects, bring forth impacts that are not already identified in existing literature, or cause a change in the magnitude of those impacts at the local, state, regional, national, or global scale.

Degree to which effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:

The lease sale is not unique or unusual. Oil and gas leasing and post-lease development have been ongoing in the United States, including portions of eastern Colorado, for more than a century. The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas. The environmental effects on the human environment are considered in the corresponding RMP/FEISs. Oil and gas exploration and drilling operations are regulated for health and safety through other agencies of local, state and federal governments. There are no predicted effects on the human environment that are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Consideration of whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration:

This project neither establishes a precedent nor represents a decision in principle about future actions. Although the leases provide the opportunity to explore for fluid minerals, there is no guarantee that a lease operator will undertake future drilling activities. The leasing of federal minerals, and more specifically fluid minerals, has been occurring since the creation of the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920. A decision to lease would not limit BLM's discretion in later resource management decisions about specific development proposals.

Consideration of whether the action is related to other actions with cumulatively significant impacts:

This EA is tiered to the information and analysis and conforms to the decisions contained in the applicable RMPs for the planning area with lands considered in this EA and the associated FEISs. Although future development could add incrementally to the oil and gas development in the eastern portion of the state, the EA did not identify any significant cumulative effects beyond

those already analyzed in the RMP/FEISs. The interdisciplinary team evaluated the lease sale in the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions.

Scientific, cultural or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places:

Because the proposed lease sale does not involve ground disturbance, the proposed undertaking will have no effect on historic properties. Any future development of parcels that are purchased as a result of the lease sale will be subject to additional National Historic Preservation Act compliance, including identification, effects assessment, and, if necessary, resolution of adverse effects. This requirement is outlined in lease stipulation CO-39 that is attached to each lease parcel.

Threatened and endangered species and their critical habitat:

All lease parcels are stipulated to protect resources if they potentially contain habitat for threatened, endangered, candidate, or other special status plant or animal species (CO-34), alerting operators to the potential for future restrictions on development if such species and/or habitat are/is found on the parcel. The parcels are also subject to stipulations consistent with the governing RMPs to protect listed and sensitive species.

Any effects that threaten a violation of federal, state or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment:

The proposed action does not violate any known federal, state, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. In addition, the proposed action is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies and programs.

PREPARER: Marie Lawrence

ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR/DATE:

FIELD MANAGER REVIEW:

Keith Berger, Field Manager
Royal Gorge Field Office

DATE SIGNED: _____

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

Steven Hall, Acting Deputy State Director
Division of Energy, Lands and Minerals

DATE SIGNED: _____