

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
Little Snake Field Office  
455 Emerson Street  
Craig, CO 81625-1129

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**EA-NUMBER:** DOI-BLM-CO-NOIO-2009-0063EA

**CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER/LEASE NUMBER:**

COC038749A: B.W. Musser Well #33

**PROJECT NAME** Powder Wash Well

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** Moffat County, Colorado

B.W. Musser Well #33: NESE Section 6, T11N, R97W, 6th PM

**APPLICANT:** Wexpro Company

**PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:** The proposed action is subject to the following plan:

Name of Plans: Little Snake Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (ROD) approved on April 26, 1989; and the Colorado Oil and Gas Leasing & Development Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and the ROD signed on November 5, 1991.

Remarks: The proposed nineteen Powder Wash Wells would be located within Management Unit 2 (Little Snake Resource Management Plan). One of the objectives of Management Unit 2 is to provide for the development of the oil and gas resource. The development of other resource uses/values within this unit is allowed consistent with the management objectives for oil, gas, and forest resources.

The proposed action has been reviewed for conformance with this plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3). The proposed action is in conformance with the objectives for this management unit.

**NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION:** To provide for the development of oil and gas resources and to supply energy resources to the American public.

**PUBLIC SCOPING PROCESS:** The Notice of Staking (NOS) has been posted in the public room of the Little Snake Field Office for a 30-day public review period beginning September 17,

2008 when the NOS was received, and may be viewed during regular business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), Monday through Friday, except holidays.

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:** The proposed action is to approve one Application for Permit to Drill (APD) submitted by Wexpro Company. Wexpro Company proposes to drill one gas well on BLM administered land located in the Powder Wash Field in T11N, R97W. An APD has been filed with the LSFO for the B.W. Musser Well #33. The APD includes drilling and surface use plans that cover mitigation of impacts to vegetation, soil, surface water, and other resources. Mitigation not incorporated by Wexpro Company in the drilling and surface use plan would be attached by the BLM as Conditions of Approval to an approved APD.

The proposed well is located approximately 65 miles northwest of Craig, Colorado. Construction work is planned to start during the fall of 2009 and the estimated duration of construction and drilling for the well is 20 days. A short access road would be constructed for the well. 440 feet of new access road would be constructed resulting in new surface disturbance of 0.3 acres. All road construction would be on lease and on BLM surface and would not require a federal Right-of-Way.

The proposed well pad would be cleared of all vegetation and leveled for drilling. Topsoil and native vegetation would be stockpiled for use in reclamation. Approximately 4.3 acres would be disturbed for construction of the well pad. This would include the 350' by 400' well pad, the topsoil, and subsoil piles. A reserve pit would be constructed on the well pad to hold drill mud and cuttings. If the well is a producer, cut portions of the well site would be backfilled and unused portions of the well site would be stabilized and re-vegetated. If the gas well proves unproductive, it would be properly plugged and the entire well pad and access road would be reclaimed.

Wexpro Company did include plans for a gas sales pipeline with the APD. Questar Gas Management Company will construct the pipeline as rights-of-way (ROW). Approximately 1,565 feet of new pipeline would be installed and connected to existing Questar pipelines in the Powder Wash Field to service the well once production is established. The proposed pipeline parallels new or existing roads. Total surface disturbance associated with pipeline construction would be 1.1 acres. The pipeline ROW would have a 50-ft construction width, reverting to 30 feet after interim reclamation. All pipeline construction would be on BLM surface.

Total surface disturbance for the proposed action would be 5.7 acres. Upon interim reclamation total surface disturbance would be 2.7 acres.

**NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE:** The “no action” alternative is that the well would not be permitted and therefore the well would not be drilled. Wexpro Company holds a valid and current oil and gas lease for the area where the proposed Powder Wash Well would be located. Under leasing contracts, the BLM has an obligation to allow mineral development if the environmental consequences are not irreversible or too severe. The APD process is designed to overcome the no action situation of not accepting the APD through the mitigation of predicted

environmental consequences. Since the proposed action is consistent with the ROD and the Oil and Gas Leasing EIS, the no action alternative will not be analyzed further in this EA.

**AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT/ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES/MITIGATION MEASURES**

**CRITICAL RESOURCES**

**AIR QUALITY**

Affected Environment: There are no special designation air sheds or non-attainment areas nearby that would be affected by the proposed action.

Environmental Consequences: Short term, local impacts to air quality from dust would result during and after well pad construction. Drilling operations produce air emissions such as exhaust from diesel engines that power drilling equipment. Air pollutants could include nitrogen oxides, particulates, ozone, volatile organic compounds, fugitive natural gas, and carbon monoxide. Gas flaring reduces the health and safety risks in the vicinity of the well by burning combustible and poisonous gases like methane and hydrogen sulfide.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Roy McKinstry 05/11/09

**AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN**

Affected Environment: Not present.

Environmental Consequences: None.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Roy McKinstry 05/11/09

**CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Affected Environment: Cultural resources, in this region of Colorado, range from late Paleo-Indian to Historic. For a general understanding of the cultural resources in this area of Colorado, see *An Overview of Prehistoric Cultural Resources, Little Snake Resource Area, Northwestern Colorado*, Bureau of Land Management Colorado, Cultural Resources Series, Number 20, *An Isolated Empire, A History of Northwestern Colorado*, Bureau of Land Management Colorado, Cultural Resource Series, Number 2 and *Colorado Prehistory: A Context for the Northern Colorado River Basin*, Colorado Council of Professional Archaeologists.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed project, B.W. Musser No. 33 well pad, has undergone a Class III cultural resource survey:

Johnson David

2009 Class III Cultural Resources Inventory for the Musser No. 33 Well Pad and Access Road (12.24.09)

The survey identified no eligible to the National Register of Historic Places cultural resources. The proposed project may proceed as described with the following mitigative measures in place.

Mitigative Measures: The following standard stipulations apply for this project:

1. The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are encountered or uncovered during any project activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate vicinity of the find and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO) at (970) 826-5000. Within five working days, the AO will inform the operator as to:

Whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; The mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the identified area can be used for project activities again; and Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g) (Federal Register Notice, Monday, December 4, 1995, Vol. 60, No. 232) the holder of this authorization must notify the AO, by telephone at (970) 826-5000, and with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), you must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.

2. If the operator wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the operator will be responsible for mitigation costs. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction.

Name of specialist and date: Robyn Watkins Morris 05/18/09

## **NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS**

A letter was sent to the Uinta and Ouray Tribal Council, Southern Ute Tribal Council, Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Council on May 5, 2008. The letter listed the FY08 and FY09 projects that the BLM would notify them on and projects that would not require notification. A followup phone call was performed on June 16, 2008. No comments were received (Letter on file at the Little Snake Field Office). This project requires no additional notification.

Name of specialist and date: Robyn Watkins Morris 05/18/09

## **ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

Affected Environment: The proposed action is located in an area of isolated dwellings. Ranching, farming and oil and gas development are the primary economic activities.

Environmental Consequences: The project area is relatively isolated from population centers, so no populations would be affected by physical or socioeconomic impacts of the proposed action. The proposed action would not directly affect the social, cultural or economic well-being and health of Native American, minority or low-income populations.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Louise McMinn 05/13/09

## **FLOOD PLAINS**

Affected Environment: Active floodplains and flood prone zones are avoided.

Environmental Consequences: No threat to human safety, life, welfare, or property will result from the proposed action.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Roy McKinstry 05/11/09

## **INVASIVE, NONNATIVE SPECIES**

Affected Environment: Invasive species and noxious weeds occur within the affected area. Downy brome (cheatgrass), yellow alyssum, blue mustard and other annual weeds are common along roadsides and on other disturbed areas. Canada thistle and several species of biennial thistles are known to occur in this area. Halogeton has become a very noticeable problem in the affected area, as well as other areas in the western portion of Moffat County. Russian knapweed and hoary cress (whitetop) have been found in the vicinity of these projects. Other species of noxious weeds are not known to be a problem in this area, but they can always be introduced by vehicle traffic, livestock and wildlife.

The BLM, Moffat County, livestock operators, pipeline companies and oil and gas operators have formed the Northwest Colorado Weed Partnership to collaborate their efforts on controlling weeds and finding the best integrated approaches to achieve these results.

Environmental Consequences: The surface disturbing activities and associated traffic involved with drilling this well, constructing the access road, installing the pipeline and subsequent activities will create an environment and provide a mode of transport for invasive species and other noxious weeds to become established. Construction equipment and any other vehicles and equipment brought onto the site can introduce weed species. Wind, water, recreation vehicles, livestock and wildlife will also assist with the distribution of weed seed into the newly disturbed areas. The annual invasive weed species (yellow alyssum, blue mustard and other annual weeds) occur on adjacent rangelands and would occupy the disturbed areas; the bare soils and the lack of competition from a perennial plant community would allow these weed species to grow unchecked and can affect the establishment of seeded plant species. Halogeton is a noxious annual weed that would also occupy the disturbed areas, but this weed species would likely require intensive control with herbicides to prevent it from moving into adjacent rangelands. Establishment of perennial grasses and other seeded plants is expected to provide the necessary control of invasive annual weeds within 2 or 3 years. Additional seeding treatments of the disturbed areas may be required in subsequent years if initial seeding efforts have failed.

The perennial and biennial noxious weeds in the area are less frequently established on the uplands but some potential exists for their establishment in draws and swales or areas along the road that would collect additional water. The largest concern in the project area would be for these species to become established and not be detected, providing seed which can be moved onto adjacent rangelands. The operator would be required to control any invasive and/or noxious weeds that become established within the disturbed areas involved with drilling and operating the well.

Mitigation attached as Conditions of Approval to minimize disturbance and obtain successful reclamation of the disturbed areas, as well as weed control utilizing integrated practices, including herbicide applications would help to control the noxious weed species. All principles of Integrated Pest Management should be employed to control noxious and invasive weeds on public lands.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Ole Olsen 2/14/09

## **MIGRATORY BIRDS**

Affected Environment: The Powder Wash area provides potential nesting habitat for ferruginous hawks, golden eagles and pinyon jays. All three of these species are listed on the USFWS 2002 Birds of Conservation Concern List.

Sandstone bluffs and juniper lined ridge tops provide nesting habitat for golden eagles and ferruginous hawks. These features can be found throughout the Powder Wash area. There are multiple historical nest sites for both species in the Powder Wash area. No known ferruginous hawk nests are located within 1 mile of the proposed well location. No known golden eagle nests are located near the proposed well location.

Juniper woodlands located along the south portion of the Powder Wash Area provide potential nesting habitat for pinyon jay.

Environmental Consequences: While the Powder Wash area does provide suitable nesting habitat for golden eagles and ferruginous hawks there are no known nests sites near the well location. As mitigated, chance of take occurring to either of these species is low.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 9/29/08

#### **PRIME & UNIQUE FARMLANDS**

Affected Environment: Not Present.

Environmental Consequences: None.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Roy McKinstry 05/11/09

#### **T&E SPECIES – ANIMALS**

Affected Environment: There are no threatened or endangered species or habitats for such species present within the proposed project area.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed development of this well in the Powder Wash area will not impact any threatened or endangered species or habitats for such species.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 9/30/08

#### **T&E SPECIES – PLANTS**

Affected Environment: There are no federally listed threatened or endangered plant species within or in the vicinity of the proposed well.

Environmental Consequences: None.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Hunter Seim 2/11/09

### **T&E SPECIES - SENSITIVE PLANTS**

Affected Environment: There are no federally listed threatened or endangered plant species within or in the vicinity of the proposed well.

Environmental Consequences: None.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Hunter Seim 02/11/09

### **WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID**

Affected Environment: If a release does occur, the environment affected would be dependent on the nature and volume of material released. If there are no releases, there would be no impact on the environment.

Environmental Consequences: Consequences would be dependent on the volume and nature of the material released. In most every situation involving hazardous materials, there are ways to remediate the area that has been contaminated. Short-term consequences would occur, but they can be remedied, and long-term impacts would be minimal.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Roy McKinstry 05/11/09

### **WATER QUALITY – GROUND**

Affected Environment: Rocks at or near the surface in Powder wash consist primarily of sedimentary Eocene age, Wasatch Formation member, Brown's Park Formation strata. These rocks can and do contain potable, useable water.

Environmental Consequences: There is the potential that during drilling and setting of surface casing the operation will encounter useable groundwater. Fresh to moderately saline groundwater (TDS concentration < 10,000 PPM) is likely to be found within the Wasatch Formation. Water flows are most likely to occur in the sandstone beds of the Wasatch Formation.

Mitigative Measures: The APD contains a geologic downhole report that requires that the Operator isolate and protect all fresh to moderately saline water (TDS < 10,000 PPM) that is encountered during drilling from communication and contamination with other fluids. The Operator is required to submit a report showing the depth and analysis of all groundwater encountered during drilling.

Name of specialist and date: Marilyn D. Wegweiser 02/20/09

## **WATER QUALITY/HYDROLOGY – SURFACE**

Affected Environment: The proposed well would be constructed near an ephemeral drainage. Any runoff from the well pad, pipeline, or access road would drain into Powder Wash. All stream segments near the well pad location are presently supporting classified beneficial uses. No impaired stream segments occur in the vicinity of the proposed action.

Environmental Consequences: Runoff water from the well site would drain towards Powder Wash, which is an ephemeral tributary to the Little Snake River. Increased sedimentation to Powder Wash during spring runoff or from high intensity rainstorms is the most likely environmental consequence from the proposed action. Although some sediment may be transported off site and eventually reach perennial waters, the mitigation provided in the Surface Use Plan and the Conditions of Approval would reduce the potential impacts caused by surface runoff.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Roy McKinstry 05/11/09

## **WETLANDS/RIPARIAN ZONES**

Affected Environment: There are no wetlands or riparian zones present within the proposed project area.

Environmental Consequences: There would be no impacts to wetlands or riparian zones as a result of the Proposed Action.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 09/29/08

## **WILD & SCENIC RIVERS**

Affected Environment: Not present.

Environmental Consequences: None.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Roy McKinstry 05/11/09

### **WILDERNESS, WSAs**

Affected Environment: Not present.

Environmental Consequences: None.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Roy McKinstry 05/11/09

### **NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS**

#### **FLUID MINERALS**

Affected Environment: Upper Mesozoic rock units would be drilled with the expectation of encountering and pumping hydrocarbons from an established drilling unit.

Environmental Consequences: If the well is completed successfully, the reservoir would be depleted. The proposed action falls within the parameters of the management use plan for MU 2.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Marilyn D. Wegweiser 02/20/09

#### **PALEONTOLOGY**

Affected Environment: Eocene age strata of the Wasatch Formation, primarily the Browns Park member.

Environmental Consequences: Rock units of the Wasatch Formation have a Paleontological Fossil Yield classification of PYFC 4b. These rocks are known to have produced significant fossils both in the LSFO area, and elsewhere.

Mitigative Measures: During operations, if any vertebrate paleontological resources are discovered, in accordance with Section 6 of Form 3100-11 and 43 CFR 3162.1, all operations affecting such sites shall be immediately suspended, and all discoveries shall be left intact until authorized to proceed by the Authorized Officer. The appropriate Authorized Officer of the Little Snake BLM office shall be notified within 48 hrs of the discovery, and a decision as to the preferred alternative/course of action will be rendered.

Name of specialist and date: Marilyn D. Wegweiser 02/20/09

## **RANGE MANAGEMENT**

**Affected Environment:** The proposed well falls within the Nipple Rim Allotment. The Nipple Rim Allotment is permitted for sheep grazing March through May and October through February for a total of 1,989 AUMs.

**Environmental Consequences:** The proposed well and associated road construction would remove approximately 5.7 acres of native vegetation. This loss of vegetation and associated disturbance from vehicle traffic, noise, and human presence may cause livestock to alter their distribution pattern. This may result in over utilization of the vegetative resources in other parts of the grazing allotment. Gates leading into the allotments could be left open by the drilling crew and other personnel, which could lead to possible livestock trespass situations. The presence of livestock may hinder reclamation efforts.

**Mitigative Measures:** Installation of a cattleguard at gate locations would prevent livestock from leaving the allotment through an open gate. Fencing of the well pad during reclamation efforts may help the establishment of native vegetation.

Name of specialist and date: Kathy McKinstry 11/19/08

## **REALTY AUTHORIZATIONS**

**Affected Environment:** The proposed project area is a developed oil and gas field and contains numerous buried pipeline rights-of-way and other realty authorizations.

**Environmental Consequences:** Existing buried pipelines or other facilities could be accidentally damaged during project activities. Impacts would be temporary until any damage is repaired.

**Mitigative Measures:** Potential damage to existing rights-of-way would be minimized by the following actions:

- Avoid existing rights-of-way during the project.
- Utilize the “One Call” system to locate and stake the centerline and limits of all underground facilities in the area prior to project initiation.
- Provide 48-hour notice to the owner/operator of all facilities prior to performing any work near existing rights-of-way.

Name of specialist and date: Louise McMinn 05/13/09

## SOILS

**Affected Environment:** The proposed well would be located within the the Talamantes loam saline soil-mapping unit. These very deep soils are well drained and found on hills, toe slopes, and alluvial fans. Slopes within this unit average 0 to 20 percent. Theses soils formed in alluvium derived from sedimentary rocks. Runoff is slow to rapid and the hazard of wind and water erosion is moderate to high.

**Environmental Consequences:** The construction and operation of the one Powder Wash Well would affect soils within and immediately adjacent to the proposed area of disturbance. Increased soil erosion from wind and water would occur during construction of the well pad, pipeline, and access road. Erosion would continue throughout the operational life of the well. Loss of topsoil, soil compaction, and possible increases in sediment loads to drainages are impacts most likely to occur.

Vegetation and soil would be removed from approximately 5.7 acres of land. Soil productivity would decline due to reduced soil microbial activity, impaired water infiltration, mixing of soil horizons, top soil loss, and introduction of weeds. Soil loss from construction would be greatest shortly after project start and would decrease in time as a result of stabilization through revegetation and reclamation of disturbed areas. Soil erosion would be reduced to an acceptable level with the mitigation described in the Surface Use Plan and Conditions of Approval in the approved APD. This mitigation would reduce the potential to have excessive sediments and salts in runoff water from the well site.

**Mitigative Measures:** Additional mitigative measures would be employed to prevent or reduce accelerated erosion if it begins to occur within or on constructed drainage and diversion ditches or surface drainages affected by the road, pipeline, or well pad.

Name of specialist and date: Roy McKinstry 05/18/09

## VEGETATION

**Affected Environment:** The well site would be located in Silty swale range site.

**Environmental Consequences:** The Proposed Action would completely remove approximately 5.7 acres of vegetation on Federal surface. The removal of vegetation would be relatively minor in the larger landscape. The removal of 5.7 acres of vegetation would be in addition to numerous other plant community intrusions such as the dense road network, other wells, and the Powder Wash Camp. As evidenced by the high levels of halogeton and cheatgrass within the undisturbed plant community, any disturbance at these locations has the potential to greatly increase the presence of these non-native species if required weed management practices are not followed. As required, the site would be partially reclaimed if the well is a producing well, and completely reclaimed if the well does not produce. Aridity, highly saline soils, and weed competition would result in very slow re-establishment of the native species that are reseeded. Careful adherence to

required reclamation practices would be vital to ensuring that the direct impacts of the Proposed Action do not have long-term adverse impacts to the plant community.

Mitigative Measures: Adherence to COAs.

Name of specialist and date: Roy McKinstry 05/18/09

### **WILDLIFE, AQUATIC**

Affected Environment: There is no aquatic wildlife habitat present within the proposed project area.

Environmental Consequences: The construction and drilling of the one well in the Powder Wash area would not impact any aquatic wildlife or their habitats.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 09/30/08

### **WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL**

Affected Environment: The Powder Wash Area provides marginal habitat for mule deer and pronghorn antelope. Occasionally, elk will utilize the area although this is primarily for migration purposes. This area does not provide critical winter habitat for any of these species. Much of the project area has been impacted by previous oil and gas development. Most big game animals avoid the project area due to heavy human activity associated with the active gas field. Halogeton has become abundant throughout most of the project area. This weedy species has further degraded wildlife habitat in this area.

Environmental Consequences: The development of one additional well in this project area will not likely have a negative impact on big game animals within the Powder Wash area. Big game animals that utilize the area now are most likely accustomed to human activity and are comfortable with it. Areas around the well pad would be avoided by wildlife during the construction and drilling phases. Any animals that have used this area would likely return to the area once construction and drilling are complete because they are accustomed to the existing disturbances.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 09/29/08

**OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS:** For the following elements, those brought forward for analysis will be formatted as shown above.

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not	Applicable or	Applicable & Present and
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	Present	Present, No Impact	Brought Forward for Analysis
Fluid Minerals			See Fluid Minerals
Forest Management	RM 09/22/08		
Hydrology/Ground		MDW 02/20/09	
Hydrology/Surface			See Hydrology/Surface
Paleontology			See Paleontology
Range Management			See Range Mgmt
Realty Authorizations			See Realty Authorizations
Recreation/Travel Mgmt		KM 5/18/09	
Socio-Economics		LM 05/13/09	
Solid Minerals		JM 02/08/09	
Visual Resources		KM 5/18/09	
Wild Horse & Burro Mgmt	RM 09/22/08		

**CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY:** Cumulative impacts may result from the development of the one Powder Wash well when added to non-project impacts that result from past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. The potential exists for future oil and gas development throughout the Powder Wash Field. Currently numerous producing wells exist within a one-mile radius of the proposed well. Other past or existing actions near the project area that have influence on the landscape are wildfire, recreation, hunting, grazing, and ranching activities.

Surface disturbance associated with oil and gas activity would increase the potential for erosion and sedimentation. Displacement of hunters and recreationists during the short-term construction and drilling periods would occur. Contrasts in line, form, color, and texture from development would impact the visual qualities on the landscape.

Cumulative impacts to the plant communities within the gas lease and adjacent areas include an incremental reduction of continuity in the plant communities in terms of acreages that remain undisturbed. Loss of continuity results in smaller and smaller areas of undisturbed native vegetation and the potential for loss of integrity within the larger plant community. Fragmented plant communities can lose resilience to natural and man-made disturbance due to isolation of areas from seed sources necessary for proper age class distribution of plants, and subsequently, a greater opportunity for stressors such as drought to have a more severe impact on the plant community as a whole. The increased disturbance also makes native plant communities more susceptible to invasion by annual weeds as vectors for increasing weeds. Even with weed control measures applied, the potential for weeds to move further into undisturbed remnant areas increases as these remnants become smaller and more isolated from larger undisturbed areas.

Cumulative impacts to the livestock grazing operations in the area are also increased through the proposed action. The grazing allotment in which this well is proposed is primarily a winter

sheep allotment. The growth in wells, roads, and human activity has reduced the availability of forage in this area far beyond direct impacts caused by construction. Halogeton which has increased among the new roads and well pads is toxic to sheep. The resulting impact to grazing activities permitted in the area is a loss of available Animal Unit Months (AUMs), i.e. a loss of the amount of livestock that the allotment can reasonably carry. Due to recent years of drought, the livestock operators have only lightly used these allotments, so direct impacts to grazing activities have not been fully felt.

Habitat fragmentation from well pad construction and the associated roads have likely decreased the nesting suitability for migratory birds in Powder Wash. Ingelfinger (2001) found that roads associated with oil and gas development have a negative impact on passerines bird species. Bird densities were reduced within 100m of each road. Due to the amount of new road construction and an increase in traffic on these roads, passerine populations in the area are likely decreasing.

The cumulative impacts of additional wells and roads in the Powder Wash field will continue to degrade habitat for the greater sage grouse. Fragmentation, mostly due to road construction, is an important factor contributing to a decrease in habitat quality. Disturbances such as higher traffic volume and other human activities also contribute to degradation of habitat quality. However, as the area is not used for nesting, brood rearing, or wintering, these impacts would be less severe. Continued oil and gas development would lead to decreased sage grouse use of the habitat.

Although big game species are able to adapt to disturbances better than other wildlife, increased development would still have impacts to mule deer and antelope. Timing stipulations adequately protect big game species during critical times of the year; however, continued oil and gas development would lead to decreased use of the habitat due to increased human activity. A significant amount of vehicle traffic occurs with oil and gas development. Impacts to big game may be vehicle-animal collisions, as these are a major cause of mortality for big game species.

#### References:

Ingelfinger, F. 2001. The Effects of Natural Gas Development on Sagebrush Steppe Passerines in Sublette County, Wyoming. University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY.

#### **STANDARDS:**

**PLANT AND ANIMAL COMMUNITY (animal) STANDARD:** Much of the Powder Wash project area is not capable of supporting healthy diverse populations of wildlife. Existing heavy oil and gas development along with the abundance of halogeton has decreased habitat quality throughout the project area. Well locations along the fringe of the developed area are still capable of supporting use by wildlife. The development of this well is likely to further displace wildlife from this area. This standard is not currently being met. The development of an additional well in this area would not improve habitat conditions for wildlife.

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 09/29/08

**SPECIAL STATUS, THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES (animal)**

**STANDARD:** There are no threatened or endangered species or habitats for such species present within the proposed project area. This standard is currently being met and would continue to be met in the future.

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 09/29/08

**PLANT AND ANIMAL COMMUNITY (plant) STANDARD:** The Proposed Action would completely remove approximately 5.7 acres of native vegetation. As long as required weed control and reclamation practices are followed, the Proposed Action would meet this standard as negative impacts to the larger plant community would be minimized and the disturbance would be essentially temporary.

Name of specialist and date: Kathy McKinstry 02/17/09

**SPECIAL STATUS, THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES (plant)**

**STANDARD:** There are no federally listed threatened or endangered or BLM sensitive plant species within or in the vicinity of the proposed well. For this well, this standard does not apply.

Name of specialist and date: Hunter Seim 2/11/09

**RIPARIAN SYSTEMS STANDARD:** There are no wetlands or riparian zones present within the project area. This standard does not apply.

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 09/29/08

**WATER QUALITY STANDARD:** The proposed action would meet the public land health standard for water quality. Reclamation of the pipeline corridors would be completed immediately after installation to minimize sheet and rill erosion from the corridor. Interim reclamation of the unused area on the well pads would be completed to minimize sheet and rill erosion from the well sites. When the well pads are no longer needed for production operations, the disturbed well pads and access roads would be reclaimed to approximate original contours, topsoil would be redistributed, and adapted plant species would be reseeded. These Best Management Practices would help to reduce accelerated erosion of the sites. No stream segments near this project are listed as impaired.

Name of specialist and date: Roy McKinstry 05/11/09

**UPLAND SOILS STANDARD:** The proposed action would not meet the upland soil standard for land health, but it is not expected to while the well locations, pipelines, and access roads are used for operations. The well pad sites, pipeline corridors, and access roads would not exhibit the characteristics of a healthy soil. Several Best Management Practices have been designed into the project or are attached as mitigating measures that would reduce impacts to and conserve soil materials. Upland soil health would return to the well pads, pipeline corridors, and access roads

disturbances after reclamation practices and well abandonments have been successfully achieved.

Name of specialist and date: Roy McKinstry 05/11/09

**PERSONS/AGENCIES CONSULTED:** Uintah and Ouray Tribal Council, Colorado Native American Commission, Colorado State Historic Preservation Office.

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)  
DOI-BLM-CO-NOIO-2009-0063EA**

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the EA and all other available information, I have determined that the proposal and the alternatives analyzed do not constitute a major Federal action that would adversely impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an EIS is unnecessary and will not be prepared. This determination is based on the following factors:

1. Beneficial, adverse, direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts have been disclosed in the EA. Analysis indicated no significant impacts on society as a whole, the affected region, the affected interests, or the locality. The physical and biological effects are limited to the Little Snake Resource Area and adjacent land.
2. Public health and safety would not be adversely impacted. There are no known or anticipated concerns with project waste or hazardous materials.
3. There would be no adverse impacts to regional or local air quality, prime or unique farmlands, known paleontological resources on public land within the area, wetlands, floodplain, areas with unique characteristics, ecologically critical areas, or designated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.
4. There are no highly controversial effects on the environment.
5. There are no effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk. Sufficient information on risk is available based on information in the EA and other past actions of a similar nature.
6. This alternative does not set a precedent for other actions that may be implemented in the future to meet the goals and objectives of adopted Federal, State, or local natural resource related plans, policies, or programs.
7. No cumulative impacts related to other actions that would have a significant adverse impact were identified or are anticipated.
8. Based on previous and ongoing cultural surveys, and through mitigation by avoidance, no adverse impacts to cultural resources were identified or anticipated. There are no known American Indian religious concerns or persons or groups who might be disproportionately and adversely affected as anticipated by the Environmental Justice Policy.

9. No adverse impacts to any threatened or endangered species or their habitat that was determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act were identified. If, at a future time, there could be the potential for adverse impacts, treatments would be modified or mitigated not to have an adverse effect or new analysis would be conducted.

10. This alternative is in compliance with relevant Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and requirements for the protection of the environment.

**DECISION AND RATIONALE:**

I have determined that approving these three APDs is in conformance with the approved land use plan. It is my decision to implement the project with the mitigation measures provided in the Application for Permit to Drill and the Conditions of Approval. The project will be monitored as stated in the Compliance Plan outlined below.

**MITIGATION MEASURES:** The mitigation measures for this project are found in the file room of the Little Snake Field Office. The APD's 12-point surface use plan, well location maps, and the Conditions of Approval are found in the well's case file labeled COC038749A, BW Musser #33.

**COMPLIANCE PLAN(S):**

**Compliance Schedule**

Compliance will be conducted during the construction phase and drilling phase to insure that all terms and conditions specified in the lease and the approved APD are followed. In the event a producing well is established, periodic inspections as identified through the Inspection and Enforcement Strategy and independent well observations will be conducted. File inspections will include a review of all required reports and the Monthly Report of Operations will be evaluated for accuracy.

**Monitoring Plan**

The well location and access road will be monitored during the term of the lease for compliance with pertinent Regulations, Onshore Orders, Notices to Lessees, or subsequent COAs until final abandonment is granted; monitoring will help determine the effectiveness of mitigation and document the need for additional mitigative measures.

**Assignment of Responsibility**

Responsibility for implementation of the compliance schedule and monitoring plan will be assigned to the Fluid Mineral staff in the Little Snake Field Office. The primary inspector will be the Petroleum Engineering Technician, but the Petroleum Engineer, Natural Resource Specialist, Realty Specialist, and Legal Instruments Examiner will also be involved.

**SIGNATURE OF PREPARER:**

**DATE SIGNED:**

**SIGNATURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWER:**

**DATE SIGNED:**

**SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:**

**DATE SIGNED:**