

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: CO-100-2006-030 EA

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER/LEASE NUMBER: COD033164-A

PROJECT NAME: F. Wilson Buried Powerline

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: SENW to SWNW Section 23, T12N, R100W, 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 powerline 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: The purpose of the proposed powerline is to provide power to a pump on the F Wilson Well #18. Wexpro Company would then transport the oil from the F Wilson Well #18 in the Hiawatha Middle Oil Sands Unit and deliver energy resources to the American public.

PUBLIC SCOPING PROCESS: The NEPA log is posted on the Little Snake Field Office web site and published in the Craig Daily Press before the application is approved and issued to the applicant.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION: The proposed action is to approve a Sundry Notice from Wexpro Company for a buried powerline from a transformer at the F Wilson Well #10 (SEnw Sec. 23, T12N, R100W) to the F Wilson Well #18 (SWNW Sec. 23, T12N, R100W). The proposed powerline would be located approximately 50 miles south of Rock Springs, Wyoming near the Hiawatha Camp. The approximate date work would start is January of 2006 and the estimated duration of construction is one week. Moffat County Roads #4 and #4S would be used to access the powerline corridor. In order to aid in the production of an existing well, Wexpro proposes to bury a powerline to supply power to a pump scheduled for installation on the F Wilson Well #18.

Wexpro Company plans to install 1130 feet of buried electrical cable beginning in the SENW Section 23, T12N, R100W at a transformer on the F Wilson Well #10 well site, then head in a southwesterly direction and terminate at the existing well pad for the F Wilson Well #18. The entire length of powerline would be installed on federal surface. No federal right-of-way is required. All construction would be completed on existing oil and gas leases within the Hiawatha Middle Oil Sands Unit.

A 3-phase, #8 electrical cable would be placed in a ditch averaging 30 inches deep made by a vibratory ripper. Where the line goes through sagebrush, a fifteen foot wide swath would be brushbeat to facilitate ditching. After placing the cable in the ditch, the ditch would be filled in. Due to the narrowness of disturbance created by the vibratory ripper, reseeding would not be necessary. The powerline cable would be centered on a flagged survey line. Wexpro Company would be responsible for weed control on the disturbed area.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE: The no action alternative is that the Sundry Notice for the powerline would not be approved and the F Wilson Well #18 would continue to produce oil at lower production levels.

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 powerline construction. The proposed action will not adversely affect the regional air quality.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Barb Blackstun 12/15/05

AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

Affected Environment: Not present.

Environmental Consequences: Not applicable.

Mitigative Measures: Not applicable

Name of specialist and date: Jim McBrayer 01/03/06

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(s), F Wilson Buried Power line, has undergone a Class III cultural resource survey:

Creasman, Steven D.

1988 Archaeological Investigation in the Hiawatha Oil Field, Moffat County, Colorado. BLM:12.88. Western Wyoming College, Archaeological Services, Rock Springs, Wyoming.

The survey identified several eligible to the National Register of Historic Places prehistoric cultural resources. This project will not impact any of these eligible cultural resources. The proposed project may proceed as described in this EA 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: Henry S. Keesling 12/15/05

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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

Environmental Consequences: None.

Mitigative Measures: None.

Name of specialist and date: Louise McMinn 01/06/06

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: Barb Blackstun 12/15/05

INVASIVE, NONNATIVE SPECIES

Affected Environment:

Environmental Consequences:

Mitigative Measures:

Name of specialist and date:

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: The proposed project area does not contain any habitat suitable for any migratory bird species.

Environmental Consequences: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 01/09/06

NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS

A letter was sent to the Uinta and Ouray Tribal Council, Southern Ute Tribal Council, Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Council, and the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs on January 21, 1999. The letter listed the projects that the BLM would notify them on and projects that would not require notification. No comments were received (Letter on file at the Little Snake Field Office). This project requires no additional notification.

Name of specialist and date: Henry S. Keesling 12/15/05

PRIME & UNIQUE FARMLANDS

Affected Environment: Not Present

Environmental Consequences: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Barb Blackstun 12/15/05

T&E SPECIES – ANIMALS

Affected Environment: There are no threatened or endangered species or habitat for such species in or near the proposed project area. The area does contain habitat for white-tailed prairie dogs however the proposed electrical line route does not cross through any active white-tailed prairie dog towns.

Environmental Consequences: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 01/09/06

T&E SPECIES – PLANTS

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

Environmental Consequences: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Hunter Seim 12/16/05

T&E SPECIES - SENSITIVE PLANTS

Affected Environment: There are no BLM sensitive plant species within or in the vicinity of the Proposed Action.

Environmental Consequences: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Hunter Seim 12/16/05

WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID

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

Environmental Consequences: Consequences will 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 will occur, but they can be remedied, and long-term impacts will be minimal.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Duane Johnson 12/15/05

WATER QUALITY – GROUND

Affected Environment: PNI; The surface geology is mostly Tertiary Luman Tongue of the Green River Formation.

Environmental Consequences: The powerline will be built with best construction practices and will not contaminate fresh water aquifers.

Mitigative Measures: none

Name of specialist and date: Fred Conrath 01/09/06

WATER QUALITY/HYDROLOGY – SURFACE

Affected Environment: No springs would be affected by the well project. Runoff water from the powerline corridor would ultimately reach Vermillion Creek. The F Wilson Buried Pipeline would be located on level terrain south of Hiawatha Camp. Runoff water would flow through ephemeral drainages towards Vermillion Creek. Vermillion Creek within the affected environment must have water quality sufficient to support Aquatic Life Warm 2, Recreation 1b (June 1 through August 31), Recreation 2 (September 1 through May 31) and Agriculture.

Environmental Consequences: Construction of the powerline trench should follow the recommendations provided in the Surface Operating Standards for Oil and Gas Development, 3rd Edition. Although some sediment may be transported off site and eventually reach perennial waters, the mitigation provided in the Plan of Development and Conditions of Approval for the Sundry Notice will reduce the potential impacts caused by surface runoff.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Barb Blackstun 12/15/05

WETLANDS/RIPARIAN ZONES

Affected Environment: There are no wetlands or riparian zones in or near the proposed project area.

Environmental Consequences: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 01/09/06

WILD & SCENIC RIVERS

Affected Environment: Not present.

Environmental Consequences: Not applicable.

Mitigative Measures: Not applicable

Name of specialist and date: Jim McBrayer 01/03/06

WILDERNESS, WSAs

Affected Environment: Not present.

Environmental Consequences: Not applicable.

Mitigative Measures: Not applicable

Name of specialist and date: Jim McBrayer 01/03/06

NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS

FLUID MINERALS

Affected Environment: The proposed action is within O & G favorability zone 4 (highest for oil and gas development). The proposed action is a buried powerline.

Environmental Consequences: The powerline will be beneficial to the development of the oil and gas resources in this area. Standard construction and reclamation practices will mitigate impacts to existing oil and gas facilities.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Fred Conrath 01/09/06

REALTY AUTHORIZATIONS

Affected Environment: The project route crosses or is adjacent to existing realty authorization COC44229, held by Questar Gas Management Company.

Environmental Consequences: Existing pipelines could be accidentally damaged during construction activities. Impacts would be temporary until the damage is repaired.

Mitigative Measures: Damage to existing pipelines would be minimized by:

- Utilize the “One Call” system to locate and stake the centerline and limits of all underground facilities in the area of proposed excavations.
- Provide 48 hour notification to the owner/operator of facilities prior to performing any work within 10 feet of buried or above ground pipelines.

Name of specialist and date: Louise McMinn 01/06/06

SOILS

Affected Environment: The powerline would be installed in soils mapped as the Leswill-Rogrube complex. Slopes in these soil mapping units average from 1 to 7 percent. These soils are found on dissected plateaus. The powerline is staked on nearly level ground.

Environmental Consequences: Some instability of the soil surface will occur in the short term following construction disturbance and reclamation, but as plants are established this soil erosion would be reduced to near natural rates.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Barb Blackstun 12/15/05

VEGETATION

Affected Environment: The Proposed Action is located within a salt desert plant community. Dominant plants include Nuttall’s saltbush (*Atriplex nuttallii*), winterfat (*Euphorbia lanata*), green rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus vicidiflorus*), squirreltail (*Sitanion hystrix*), Indian ricegrass (*Oryzopsis hymenoides*), and Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa sandbergii*). Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata tridentata*) exists in dense patches interspersed throughout the area.

Environmental Consequences: The use of a vibratory ripper to place the powerline would result in very minimal disturbance to the plant community. The greatest impact would result from crushing of vegetation by the vibratory ripper itself and brushbeating areas of big sagebrush. Crushing would result in mortality of some individual plants and brush beating would result in mortality of most sagebrush, but the majority of the remaining species would remain intact. The action of the vibratory ripper would result in very minimal and highly localized plant disturbance. Due to the minimal nature of disturbance, reseeding would not be necessary.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Hunter Seim 12/16/05

WILDLIFE, AQUATIC

Affected Environment: There is no aquatic wildlife habitat in or near the proposed project area.

Environmental Consequences: None

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 01/09/06

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL

Affected Environment: The proposed project area provides marginal habitat for pronghorn antelope and mule deer. A variety of small mammal species may also be found throughout the project area.

Environmental Consequences: The proposed electrical line should not have a negative impact on any of these species. Some individual animals may be displaced while construction activities are being conducted. Any displaced animals will likely return once construction is complete.

Mitigative Measures: None

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 01/09/06

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 Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Fluid Minerals			See Fluid Minerals
Forest Management		BB 01/10/06	
Hydrology/Ground		FC 01/09/06	
Hydrology/Surface		BB 12/15/05	
Paleontology		RE 12/15/05	
Range Management		HS 12/16/05	
Realty Authorizations			See Realty
Recreation/Travel Mgmt		RS 01/03/06	
Socio-Economics		LM 01/06/06	
Solid Minerals		RE 12/15/05	
Visual Resources		JM 01/03/06	

Wild Horse & Burro Mgmt	VMD 12/27/05		
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CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY: Cumulative impacts may result from the development of the F Wilson Buried Powerline 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 Hiawatha Field. Currently numerous producing wells exist within a one-mile radius of the proposed powerline. 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. Only a small reduction in available forage would be anticipated. Some wildlife species may be temporarily displaced by construction at the pipeline route, but should return once construction is completed. Contrasts in line, form, color, and texture from development would impact the visual qualities on the landscape.

Over the last 20 years there has been a slow but steady increase in oil and gas production facilities within the Hiawatha Field. Cultural resource surveys in the area have identified several prehistoric cultural resources. These resources were at one time further away from the industry activity. Now they are in close proximity to these facilities. As infield development occurs with more pipeline, compressors, access roads, and pads being constructed, a real potential for impacts to known and yet to be recorded cultural resources is present.

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 weeds increase. 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 pipeline 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, pipelines, 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 operator has only lightly used this allotment, so direct impacts to grazing activities have not been fully felt. However, as precipitation patterns improve, there will be a

likely significant decrease in the amount of livestock that can be permitted on the allotment. Utilization and production monitoring of unaffected areas remaining in the allotment would be necessary to determine a proper stocking rate after accounting for the loss of available forage from gas development (both direct and indirect) if improving precipitation patterns result in better forage conditions throughout the allotment.

The cumulative effects of projected oil and gas development are minimized through Best Management Practices identified in the Surface Use Plan of the APD and the BLM required mitigation in the Conditions of Approval for the APD. Proper construction and drilling practices must comply with federal and state environmental regulations. All oil and gas related development in the area would be completed in accordance with Onshore Order No. 2. Reasonably foreseeable mineral development would occur under the guidelines of the Little Snake Resource Management Plan and the Colorado Oil and Gas Leasing and Development EIS.

STANDARDS:

PLANT AND ANIMAL COMMUNITY (animal) STANDARD: The proposed project area provides marginal habitat for a variety of terrestrial wildlife species. The installation of an underground electrical line will have no long term impact on this areas ability to support wildlife. This project will not prevent this standard from being met.

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 01/09/06

SPECIAL STATUS, THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES (animal) STANDARD: There are no threatened, endangered, or special status species present in or near the project area. This standard does not apply.

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 01/09/06

PLANT AND ANIMAL COMMUNITY (plant) STANDARD: The plant community that would be impacted by the Proposed Action is currently meeting this standard. Species diversity, abundance of native plants, and plant vigor are all acceptable for the site and climactic conditions. The Proposed Action would meet this standard as minor brushbeating and the use of a vibratory ripper would result in highly localized and very minimal disturbance to the plant community. The Proposed Action would meet this standard.

Name of specialist and date: Hunter Seim 12/16/05

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 Action. This standard does not apply.

Name of specialist and date: Hunter Seim 12/16/05

RIPARIAN SYSTEMS STANDARD: There are no wetlands or riparian systems in or near the project area. This standard does not apply.

Name of specialist and date: Timothy Novotny 01/09/06

WATER QUALITY STANDARD: The proposed action would meet the public land health standard for water quality. No stream segments near this project are listed as impaired.

Name of specialist and date: Barb Blackstun 12/15/05

UPLAND SOILS STANDARD: The proposed action will not meet the upland soil standard for land health in the short term. The powerline corridor will not exhibit the characteristics of a healthy soil after construction. Upland soil health will return when revegetation of the corridor has been successfully achieved.

Name of specialist and date: Barb Blackstun 12/15/05

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

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
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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 this Sundry Notice is in conformance with the approved land use plan. It is my decision to implement the project with the mitigation measures provided in the Sundry Notice 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 Sundry Notice's plan of development, powerline location map, and the Conditions of Approval are found in the F Wilson Well #18 file, labeled COD033164-A, Well #18.

COMPLIANCE PLAN(S):

Compliance Schedule

Compliance will be conducted during the installation phase to insure that all terms and conditions specified in the lease, and the approved Sundry Notice are followed. File inspections will include a review of all required reports and the Monthly Report of Operations will be evaluated for accuracy.

Monitoring Plan

The powerline will be monitored during the term of the lease for compliance with pertinent Regulations, Onshore Orders, NTLs, 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. Primary inspectors 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: