

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
White River Field Office  
220 E Market St  
Meeker, CO 81641

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**NUMBER:** DOI-BLM-CO-110-2011-0062-EA

**CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER:** COC74721

**PROJECT NAME:** Relocate Emergency Helicopter Landing Site

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** Sixth Principal Meridian  
T.2S., R.96W.,  
sec. 6, lot 26.

**APPLICANT:** Exxon Mobil Corporation

**ISSUES AND CONCERNS:** Although the site is on a pre-disturbed area and there will be no surface disturbance, there is no existing right-of-way nor is there an existing NEPA document that discusses helicopter use.

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:**

***Background/Introduction:*** DOI-BLM-CO-110-2011-0026-CX analyzed a location for an emergency helicopter landing site next to Rio Blanco County Road 76. Exxon had requested a new location that was not brought forward into that analysis. Therefore DOI-BLM-CO-110-2011-0026-CX has been cancelled. The new location would not involve access or landing adjacent to the county road, avoids possible traffic complications, and will better serve Piceance Creek Unit, Freedom Unit, and North Piceance Creek Unit.

In the past, BLM has authorized locations that can be used for emergency response helicopter landing sites. However, since they were not authorized as designated sites, it has not been clear where they are located, records were not generally available, and there has there been no protection from other uses being authorized over the helipad use. The only official helipad in the Piceance Basin is the Shell Frontier office site. Other sites include the hospitals and airports in Meeker and Rangely. Previous sites designated by Exxon and the emergency helicopter service have been connected to drill pads and needed to be moved with each new pad. The proposed site would be for emergency use only and would serve pending and current oil and gas development operations.

**Proposed Action:** Exxon Mobil Corporation (Exxon) has requested authorization from the White River Field Office to establish an emergency helipad in a centralized location to serve existing and future oil and gas operations in the Piceance Creek, Freedom, and North Piceance Units. An area map is attached as Exhibit A. The Plan of Development is included as Attachment 1. The proposed layout (signage, wind sock, etc.) follow the current direction from the emergency medical service provider to Exxon. If Flight for Life or other medical emergency server requests modifications, then continued authorization will require Exxon to meet those requirements.

The proposed site is located on the reclaimed well pad for the Mobil Oil Corp. T56-6G. Note: The COGCC location for this dry hole is incorrect. Tri-State Surveying has measured correct footages as Sec. 6, T2S, R96W, 6th P.M.2032' FSL 2000' FEL.

The area would be used to unload patients from a medic truck to an emergency response helicopter. The surface area would be 100 feet by 100 feet on existing terrain with no new construction or disturbance planned. The site would be identified with orange, removable traffic cones and the installation of a permanent wind sock, approximately 10 feet tall. A permanent sign in a fluorescent color would be placed to identify the Landing Zone. Access will be by an existing lease road. The road would continue to be maintained to provide all-weather access.

Because the access and the landing site will serve multiple oil and gas units, this section of road and the landing area will require a right-of-way. The new right-of-way for the access road segment will be 1,710 long and 30 feet wide and the actual landing site will be 100 feet by 100 feet. Approximately 1.4 acres will be encumbered with no new disturbance. Authorization will be by COC74721.

**No Action Alternative:** If the proposed action is not approved, emergency helicopters would not have a pre-planned location for landing and potential landing sites would have to be determined at the time of a medical emergency. This could lead to delays in medical transport. There would be no placement of the windsock or permanent sign.

**ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD:** A previously proposed location was located adjacent to Rio Blanco County Road 76. The new location is closer to the active field development and would not require direct access from a busy county road, while still allowing all-season access.

**PURPOSE & NEED FOR THE ACTION:** BLM's purpose and need for this action are established by the BLM's responsibility under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) to respond to an applicant request to establish and operate a location for emergency helicopter landing. BLM is responsible for managing multiple uses on public lands in a manner that avoids, minimizes, reduces, or mitigates potential impacts to other resource values.

Exxon has proposed the action to fill a need for a pre-determined, centralized location for landing a helicopter in emergency situations.

The decision to be made by the White River Field Office is whether to authorize the proposed site and, if so, under what conditions.

**PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:** The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP).

Date Approved: July 1, 1997

Decision Number/Page: Page 2-49

Decision Language: “To make public lands available for the siting of public and private facilities through the issuance of applicable land use authorizations, in a manner that provides for reasonable protection of other resource values.”

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

**STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH:** In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Typically, a finding must be made for each standard in an environmental analysis, however since none of the resources that contribute the standards required detailed analysis in relation to impacts possible from the Proposed Action, findings are not included in this EA.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM ANALYSIS RECORD CHECKLIST**

<b>DETERMINATION OF STAFF:</b>		
<b>Determination</b>	<b>Resource</b>	<b>Rationale for Determination*</b>
<b>Natural, Biological and Cultural Resources</b>		
NI	Air Quality	Additional use of this site for emergency helicopter landing would not add additional emissions beyond casual use that is common in this area for vehicle use. Dust would be generated during take-off and landing especially on dry or windy days, but also would be typical of vehicle use of roads and would be moderated by vegetation on the site.
NI	Soils	No additional disturbance is proposed for this site. There is likely to be some vegetation management of the site to maintain safe conditions, but this will not change soil characteristics at the site.
NI	Wastes (Hazardous or Solid)	No hazardous or solid wastes are known to be present at the site or would be generated as a result of the proposed action.
NP	Water Quality (Surface/Ground)	No additional disturbance is proposed for this site. With such limited use as being proposed the spilling of fuel or lubricants are negligible with no additional refueling at the site proposed.

<b>DETERMINATION OF STAFF:</b>		
<b>Determination</b>	<b>Resource</b>	<b>Rationale for Determination*</b>
NP	Wetlands/Riparian Zones	The nearest riparian or wetland community lies about 1.5 miles east of the proposed action in an unconnected watershed. The nearest downstream riparian or wetland community is Piceance Creek, which is separated from the proposed action by over 6 miles of ephemeral channel.
NI	Vegetation	The proposed action is located on a reclaimed/re-vegetated well pad. Infrequent use of the area by a helicopter for emergency purposes will not significantly impact the vegetation in the area.
NI	Invasive, Non-native Species	Besides the use of the installation of a windsock, there will be little change to the current environment. Use of the pad by a helicopter will be limited to infrequent emergency events and will not create significant disturbance to existing vegetation that would increase the odds of invasive or non-native species to establish.
NP	Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Plant Species	There are not special status plant species within the area of the proposed action. There is potential habitat located .75 miles north of the proposed action, but infrequent use of this pad by a helicopter is not expected to influence the area.
NI	Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Animal Species	There are no animals listed or proposed for listing under the ESA that inhabit or derive important benefit from the project area. Magnolia supports a remnant population of greater sage-grouse (probably less than 20 birds) whose current distribution is confined to sagebrush habitats 1 to 1.5 miles east of the project site. Although the project is associated with a 350-acre parcel of habitat considered capable of supporting grouse, owing perhaps to a heavily industrialized area located at a ridgeline bottleneck, there has been no documented use of this northwest extension for over 30 years. The site extends about 100 feet off a heavily used gas field access road. Use of the pad while the field remains active would be confined to very infrequent emergency events where human health and safety would override the consequences of short term disruptions in the unlikely event that sage-grouse re-establish use on this portion of Magnolia.
NI	Migratory Birds	Besides the installation of a windsock, there would generally be no change in the existing nature of the site or its capability in supporting migratory bird nesting activity. The site extends about 100 feet off a heavily used gas field access road--a roadside zone that offers diminished capacity to serve as nesting habitat, particularly for BLM-sensitive Brewer's sparrow. Use of the pad would be confined to very infrequent emergency events where human health and safety would override any reasonable concern for the outcome of localized nesting efforts (i.e., roughly six pair based on average nest density in road-compromised sagebrush habitats).
NP	Wildlife, Aquatic	The nearest downstream aquatic community is Piceance Creek, which is separated from the proposed action by over six miles of ephemeral channel.
NI	Wildlife, Terrestrial	There would generally be no change in the existing nature of this upland sagebrush site or its current capability in supporting terrestrial wildlife use, including general big game winter range. The site extends about 100 feet off a heavily used gas field access road; a roadside zone that offers little functional value as a big game forages or cover source. The nearest raptor nest that has supported use over the last 3 years is about 0.7 mile distant. Use of the pad would be

<b>DETERMINATION OF STAFF:</b>		
<b>Determination</b>	<b>Resource</b>	<b>Rationale for Determination*</b>
		confined to very infrequent emergency events where human health and safety would override any reasonable concern for temporary disruption of nearby animal use.
NP	Wild Horses	This location is not within the Piceance-East Douglas Herd Management Area which is located approximately 5 miles west of the site; however, the WRFO has a few wild horses located to this area. Past gather operations were not able to gather all of the wild horses in this area. BLM will attempt future gathering operations in this area to gather all of the wild horses in this area.
NI	Cultural Resources	The proposed landing site, in addition to being a plugged and abandoned well site, has been inventoried at the Class III (100% pedestrian) level (Niswanger 2009 Compliance Dated 5/6/2009, Piontkowski 2003 Compliance Dated 7/16/2003, Robertson 2008 Compliance Dated 2/27/2009) with no cultural resources located in the area. The landing site involves no new construction and the only impacts could be from trampling as people work around the helicopter to load or unload material and/or people. There will be no new impacts to any known cultural resources.
NI	Paleontology	The proposed action involves no new ground disturbance therefore there is very little likelihood of impacting noteworthy fossil resources.
NP	Native American Religious Concerns	No Native American Religious Concerns are known in the area, and none have been noted by Northern Ute tribal authorities. Should recommended inventories or future consultations with Tribal authorities reveal the existence of such sensitive properties, appropriate mitigation and/or protection measures may be undertaken.

NP = not present in the area impacted by the proposed or alternative actions

NI = present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required

PI = present with potential for impact analyzed in detail in the EA

#### **ELEMENTS NOT PRESENT OR NOT AFFECTED:**

No flood plains or prime and unique farmlands exist within the area affected by the proposed action. There are also no Native American religious or environmental justice concerns associated with the proposed action.

**OTHER ELEMENTS:** For the following elements, only those brought forward for analysis will be addressed further.

Other Elements	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Visual Resources			X
Fire Management		X	
Forest Management	X		
Hydrology/Water Rights		X	
Rangeland Management		X	
Realty Authorizations		X	
Recreation	X		
Access and Transportation			X
Geology and Minerals	X		
Areas of Environmental Concern	X		
Wilderness	X		
Wild and Scenic Rivers	X		
Cadastral	X		
Socio-Economics	X		
Law Enforcement		X	

## VISUAL RESOURCES

*Affected Environment:* The proposed action would traverse a Visual Resource Management (VRM) III classified area. The objective of the VRM III class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The proposed action would occur on an existing non-producing well pad with a dry hole. The changes to the site will be minimal to maintain vegetation and access into the site. It will only be used in emergency situations and will not be a permanent designated landing pad. The addition of the windsock, sign and occasionally traffic cones will be a minor change to the existing landscape allowing the VRM III classification to be retained.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no change to the existing landscape and the existing non-producing well pad will remain until reclaimed.

*Mitigation:* None.

## ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

*Affected Environment:* Access into the area uses Rio Blanco County Road 76, BLM road 1266, and another non-numbered BLM road. The area is currently being developed for the extraction of natural gas. These routes are currently experiencing the traffic associated with the development.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Since the action is for emergency situations only, traffic associated with the site will add minimally to the traffic occurring in the area. The only increase expected for the site would be during the conversion phase from the non-producing well pad to the landing pad and the occasional vegetation maintenance activities.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no increase in traffic associated with the site.

*Mitigation:* None.

**CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY:** This action is consistent with the scope of impacts addressed in the White River ROD/RMP. The cumulative impacts of energy-related development are addressed in the White River ROD/RMP for each resource value that would be affected by the proposed action. The short-term duration of construction activity and of impacts from the expected operation would result in negligible cumulative impacts for most resources and no long-term cumulative impacts following cessation and reclamation of the proposed project.

## REFERENCES CITED:

Niswanger, Jake

- 2009 ExxonMobil Corporation: A Class III Cultural Resources Inventory of the Proposed PCU 269-6B (relocated) Well Pad and Access Road in Rio Blanco County, Colorado. Metcalf Archaeological Consultants, Inc., Eagle, Colorado. #09-54-28

Piontkowski, Michael

- 2003 A Report of the Class III Inventory of the Magnolia WUI Project, Rio Blanco County, Colorado. Uncompahgre Archaeological Consultants, Grand Junction, Colorado. #03-145-04

Robertson, Brett

- 2008 ExxonMobil Corporation: A Class III Cultural Resources Inventory of the Proposed PCU 269-6B Well Pad and Access Road in Rio Blanco County, Colorado. Metcalf Archaeological Consultants, Inc., Eagle, Colorado. #09-54-17

**PERSONS / AGENCIES CONSULTED:** None.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Area of Responsibility</b>	<b>Date Signed</b>
Bob Lange	Hydrologist and Soil/Water/Air Program Lead	Air Quality, Water Quality, Surface and Ground Hydrology and Water Rights, Soils	3/10/ 2011
Michael Selle	Archeologist	Cultural Resources, Paleontological Resources	02/16/2011
Matthew Dupire	Rangeland Management Specialist	Invasive, Non-Native Species, Vegetation , Rangeland Management Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Threatened and Endangered Plant Species	03/09/ 2011
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Migratory Birds, Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Animal Species, Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife, Wetlands and Riparian Zones	03/02/ 2011
Christina Barlow	Natural Resource Specialist/HazMat Coordinator	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid	03/14/ 2011
Jim Michels	Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist	Wilderness, Access and Transportation, Recreation	03/08/2011
Jim Michels	Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist / Forester	Fire Management, Forest Management	03/08/2011
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals	03/07/2011
Linda Jones	Realty Specialist	Realty Authorizations	03/07/2011
Jim Michels	Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist	Visual Resources	03/08/2011
Melissa J. Kindall	Range Technician	Wild Horse Management	03/10/2011

**Finding of No Significant Impact/Decision Record  
(FONSI/DR)**

**DOI-BLM-CO-110-2011-0062-EA**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)/RATIONALE:** The environmental assessment and analysis of the environmental effects of the proposed action have been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures (listed below) result in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

**DECISION/RATIONALE:** The Proposed Action has been analyzed for compliance with the White River Resource Management Plan and other applicable regulations. Therefore, it is my decision to authorize the installation and operation of an emergency helicopter landing site and access road with the following mitigation measure:

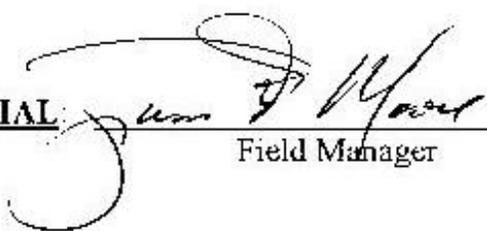
**MITIGATION MEASURES:** The holder is responsible for operating and maintaining the site according to the proponent committed measures in the Plan of Development and the Proposed Action (Attachment 1).

**COMPLIANCE/MONITORING:** On-going compliance inspections and monitoring will be conducted by White River Field Office staff during the operation, maintenance, and reclamation of the project.

**NAME OF PREPARER:** Linda Jones

**NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR:** Heather Sauls

**SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:**



Field Manager

**DATE SIGNED:**

3/18/11

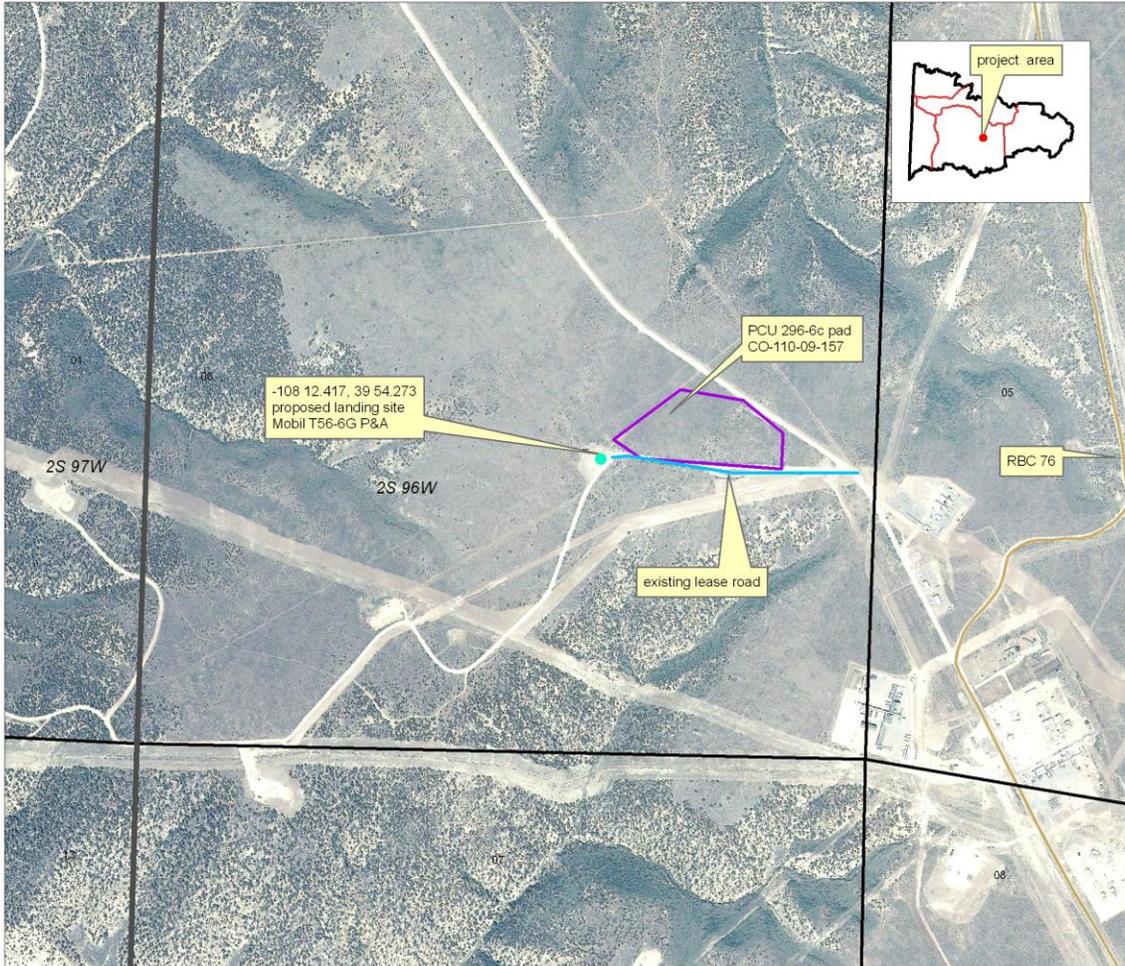
**ATTACHMENTS:** Exhibit A – Map of the Exxon Emergency Helicopter Landing Site  
Attachment 1 - Plan of Development

Exhibit A



RELOCATE EXXON EMERGENCY HELICOPTER LANDING SITE

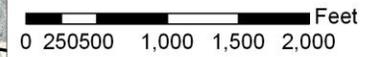
EXHIBIT



DOI/BLMCO-110-20110062EA



- ACEC
- PLSS\_Townships\_GCDB2008
- PLSS\_Sections\_GCDB2008
- County
- State
- BLM
- CDW
- County
- FOR
- NPS
- PRI
- STA



2/2011 LLJ

Source:  
BLM/BLM COOH, et al.  
Disclaimer:  
Although this data is provided with this map, all the data that  
has been provided is provided as a service of BLM. It  
is not intended to be used for any other purpose. The user  
will use this data at their own risk. BLM does not warrant  
accuracy or imply any responsibility.

## Attachment 1

### Revised PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT (POD)

(Attached to that certain application for a permanent ExxonMobil Helicopter Landing Zone Surface ROW site to serve Freedom, North Piceance and Piceance Creek Unit operations)

1. Purpose and Need for the Facility
  - a. what will be built  
Helicopter Landing Zone for emergency response serving all existing and future wellpads and rigs in the Piceance Creek Unit, Freedom Unit and North Piceance Unit areas.
  - b. what is use  
Area to unload patient(s) from medic truck to helicopter.
  - c. what is size  
100' X 100' surface width., including ~ 1 mile of existing BLM lease road
  - d. does the proposal involve new construction, reconstruction, or improvement of an existing road  
No new construction is planned for the site, since the site is an existing abandoned wellpad site and existing BLM lease road. EM plans to use the existing terrain. No grading is expected.
  - e. is the use temporary or permanent  
Permanent
  - f. is this ancillary to an existing right-of-way  
No existing EM ROWS are in the areas.
  - g. type and volume of traffic that is anticipated  
Emergency response personnel with little to no traffic.
  - h. season of use  
Year round
  - i. origination and destination of the access road and site location  
The site is approximately 1 mile west from the intersection of CR 76 and CR 3A. The site will be accessed by using an existing BLM lease road.
  - j. alternative routes or locations, if proposed are not within a designated corridor  
No alternate feasible route is available direct access from CR 76 in this area. This site was chosen in order to efficiently serve three unit areas.
2. Right-of-way Location
  - a. legal description  
Proposed mountain location is located on a section of land (N 39 54.273', W 108 12.417') in NW/4 SE/4 Sec.6- 2 South, 96 West 6th PM, Rio Blanco County, CO.
  - b. maps tied to section corners and drawings  
See the attached
  - c. road cross sections, and plans and profiles  
N/A
3. Facility Design Factors
  - a. minimum and maximum engineering standards for site and road(s)
    - 1) construction standards of the site  
None are planned. We plan to use the existing terrain, as it is flat and our needs do not require that the areas be graded or bladed. Access road is existing.
    - 2) maximum grade and pitch of the site  
None, site is basically level
    - 3) requirements and location of drainage ditches, culverts, bridges, and low-water crossings for access road to site  
None

- 4) if the access road will be surfaced, what surfacing material will be used  
N/A
- 5) length and width of access road and site area  
N/A
- 6) cut and fill diagrams  
N/A
- b. detailed engineering plans and specifications for major structures
  - 1) major culverts, bridges, retaining walls  
No major structures identified at this time.
- c. temporary use areas needed  
None. All use areas will be inside of the proposed disturbance identified in the permit application.
- 4. Additional Components
  - a. existing components on and off public land  
We will install a permanent wind sock ~ 10' in height. The site will be identified by using 4 orange removable traffic cones.
  - b. possible future components on and off public land  
None
  - c. is there a need for sand and gravel supplies from public land  
None anticipated
  - d. location of equipment storage areas  
Equipment will be stored on the permitted area.
- 5. Government Agencies Involved
  - a. are Corps of Engineers Section 404 permits needed  
No
  - b. are State or local permits, easements, or dedications needed  
Rio Blanco County Special Use Permit and a Road Turn out permit, if required by RBC Road and Bridge Dept.
- 6. Construction of facilities
  - a. construction (brief description)
    - 1) major facilities (including vehicles and number of tons and loads)  
None
    - 2) ancillary facilities (including vehicles and number of tons and loads)  
A wind sock ~ 10' in height will be installed at said site.
    - 3) methods of construction and types of equipment to be used on the site right-of-way  
None
  - b. work force (number of people and vehicles)  
Approximately 25 employees and 15 vehicles over the duration of the construction activity.
  - c. flagging or staking of the right-of-way  
None, sign will be posted designating helicopter LZ in fluorescent color
  - d. clearing and grading  
None
  - e. facility construction data
    - 1) description of construction process  
N/A
  - f. access to and along right-of-way during construction  
N/A
  - g. contingency planning  
None
  - h. safety requirements  
All work will be conducted following ExxonMobil, Industry and OSHA safety requirements.

- i. industrial wastes and toxic substances  
N/A
- j. seasonal restrictions on various activities  
N/A
- 7. Resource Values and Environmental Concerns
  - a. address at level commensurate with anticipated impacts
    - 1) location with regard to existing corridors  
Proposed site follows existing access track.
  - b. anticipated conflicts with resources or public health and safety
    - 1) air, noise, wilderness but only when helicopters are present?
- 8. Stabilization and Rehabilitation
  - a. soil replacement and stabilization  
Will spray dust suppressant or place matting to reduce soil and dust disturbance.
  - b. disposal of vegetation removed during construction (i.e., trees, shrubs, etc.)  
None
  - c. seeding specifications  
As prescribed by the BLM in the permit Conditions Of Approval.
  - d. fertilizer  
None anticipated.
  - e. limiting access to right-of-way  
As prescribed by the BLM in the permit Conditions Of Approval.
- 9. Operation and Maintenance
  - a. minimum maintenance and maintenance schedule  
Road will be maintained as necessary to provide 'all weather' access.
  - b. placement of control, warning, and directional traffic signs  
Signs will be posted to designate helicopter LZ.
  - c. maintenance of special needs such as snow removal, seasonal closure, and controlled access  
Maintenance will include provision for snow removal to ensure 'all weather' access.
  - d. safety  
N/A
  - e. industrial wastes and toxic substances  
N/A
  - f. inspection and maintenance schedules  
Inspection for erosion control and maintenance will be initially performed as specified in the Individual Storm Water Management Plan. Subsequent inspections will be performed on a semi-annual basis (spring/ fall).
  - g. work schedules  
N/A
  - h. fire control  
N/A
  - i. inspections  
See (f) above.
  - j. contingency planning  
N/A
- 10. Termination and Restoration
  - a. determine if the road and site will be totally obliterated  
As required by BLM at time of abandonment.
  - b. what structures will be left in place or removed  
As required by BLM at time of abandonment.
  - c. stabilization and re-vegetation of disturbed area  
None anticipated, location should not be bladed or scraped to disturb the vegetation.