Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
DOI-BLM-CO-F02-2014-015 EA

Based on review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects from any alternative assessed or evaluated meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined by 43 CFR 1508.27; nor do they exceed those effects as described in the Royal Gorge Field Office RMP (1996, as amended in 1997 and 2002) or the Northeast RMP (1986, as amended in 1991 and 1997) or their respective FEISs and Records of Decision (RODs). Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below.

Context:
Oil and gas leasing in the Royal Gorge Field Office includes all those federal fluid mineral resources in Colorado, east of the continental divide, with the exception of the federal fluid mineral estate within Kremmling Field Office boundary. The current lease sale notice contains parcels in Baca, El Paso, Elbert, Kiowa, Kit Carson, Lincoln, Washington and Weld Counties. All parcels are in rural settings and most are distant from even small communities; all parcels are situated on the eastern plains, existing as a patchwork of dry land farming and uncultivated short grass prairie. The two small parcels in Kiowa County are situated within the confines of the Queens State Wildlife Area. Of those counties with parcels in the current lease sale, historically, Weld County has had the greatest oil and gas activity with the remaining counties having more minor levels of development. Certain aspects associated with the proposed lease parcels, such as air and water quality and energy development have state-wide and regional importance.

Intensity:

The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27 and incorporated into resources and issues considered (includes supplemental authorities Appendix 1 H-1790-1) and supplemental Instruction Memorandum, Acts, regulations and Executive Orders.

The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal:

Impacts that may be beneficial and adverse: There are no direct impacts to resources from the act of leasing. The indirect impacts from leasing would be the potential future impacts from development of those leases at the APD stage. Beneficial impacts would include the potential for development of energy resources that would aid in reducing the nations reliance on foreign oil. Regional or local benefits could include the infusion jobs and economic benefits to local business and governments. Adverse impacts at the development stage could potentially include drilling and production facilities and roads impacting wildlife, vegetation, and riparian, air, water, cultural and visual resources. Potential impacts to these resources are minimized

through lease stipulations and if necessary, further mitigation and conditions applied at the APD and production stage. None of the environmental effects associated with offering the proposed lease parcels for sale, as discussed in detail in the EA, were determined to be significant, nor do the effects exceed those described in the Royal Gorge and Northeast RMPs and their respective FEISs/RODs.

Public health and safety: Issues involving public health and safety that might arise at the APD and development stage include potential impacts on air and water quality as well as increased traffic and noise during the drilling phases of production. Other potential impacts to public health could result from contamination at well and facility sites. If the parcels are sold and the leases enter into a development stage, public health or safety would be addressed by following lease stipulations and health and safety regulations, and through conditions of approval imposed as required following site-specific analysis.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area: The EA evaluated the area of the proposed action and determined that no unique geographic characteristics such as Wild and Scenic Rivers, Prime or Unique Farmlands, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, designated Wilderness areas, or Wilderness Study Areas were present.

Degree to which effects are likely to be highly controversial: There is little disagreement or controversy as to the level or nature of the effects of the proposed action on resource values.

Degree to which effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks: The lease sale is not unique or unusual. Oil and gas leasing and post-lease development have been ongoing in the United States, including portions of eastern Colorado, for more than a century. The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas. The environmental effects to the human environment are considered in the corresponding RMPs/FEISs/RODs. Oil and gas exploration and drilling operations are regulated for health and safety through other agencies of local, State and Federal government. Should there be discovered risks, these agencies would act accordingly. There are no predicted effects on the human environment that are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Consideration of whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration: This project neither establishes a precedent nor represents a decision in principle about future actions. The leasing of federal minerals and more specifically fluid minerals has been occurring since the creation of the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920. The impacts of the proposed action were considered by the interdisciplinary team within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. A decision to lease for the November 2013 sale would not limit later resource management decisions for areas open to development proposals. Significant contributions to cumulative effects are not expected from the November 2013 Lease Sale.

Consideration of whether the action is related to other actions with cumulatively significant impacts: The action of oil and gas leasing itself does not contribute to cumulative impacts to resource values, but indirect effects from potential future development of the leases

could have cumulative impacts. The EA did not reveal any significant cumulative effects beyond those already analyzed in the Royal Gorge and Northeast RMPs/FEISs. The interdisciplinary team evaluated the possible actions in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions. Significant new cumulative effects are not expected. At any given location cumulative impacts from oil and gas development along with other actions will be quite variable and a more accurate assessment can be made at the development or APD stage. Lease stipulations and Conditions of Approval at the APD stage, including reclamation requirements, reduce the potential for cumulative impacts to resource values.

Scientific, cultural or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places: Because the proposed lease sale does not involve ground disturbance, the proposed undertaking will have no effect on historic properties. Any future development of parcels that are purchased as a result of the lease sale will be subject to additional Section 106 compliance, including identification, effects assessment, and, if necessary, resolution of adverse effects. This requirement is outlined in lease stipulation CO-39 that is attached to each lease parcel.

Threatened and endangered species and their critical habitat: The act of leasing the parcels for oil and gas development would have no direct impact on wildlife resources; however, the authorization to lease parcels for oil and gas development will likely result in future development at some locations. Exploration and development of leased parcels would likely impact wildlife. The magnitude and location of direct and indirect effects cannot be predicted until the site-specific APD stage of development. The current lease development could potentially affect the following special-status species: Lesser prairie chicken, black-tailed prairie dog, swift fox, Townsend's big eared bat, common kingsnake, milk snake, massasauga, mountain plover, American white pelican, ferruginous hawk and bald eagle. All lease parcels are stipulated to potentially contain habitat for threatened, endangered, candidate, or other special status plant or animal species (CO-34), alerting operators as to the potential for future restrictions on development if such species and/or habitat is found on the parcel. Parcels are also stipulated appropriately with provisions within respective RMPs to protect species that are currently listed or deemed sensitive.

Any effects that threaten a violation of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment: The proposed action does not violate any known Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. In addition, the proposed action is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies and programs.

NAME OF PREPARER: /s/ Aaron Richter

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: /s/ Martin Weimer

FIELD MANAGER REVIEW: /s/ Keith Berger

DATE: 11/07/2014

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: Lonny R Bagley

Lonny R. Bagley, Deputy State Director
Division of Energy, Lands and Minerals

DATE SIGNED: 11/12/14