Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
DOI-BLM-CO-F020-2015-0021-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 Northeast RMP and amendment (September 1986 and November 1991) and Royal Gorge Field Office RMP (May 1996) and Records of Decision (ROD). Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below.

Context:
Oil and gas leasing in the Royal Gorge Field Office includes all those federal fluid mineral resources in Colorado, east of the continental divide, with the exception of the federal fluid mineral estate within Kremmling Field Office boundary. The EA analyzes a total of 21 lease parcels in Huerfano, Las Animas, and Weld Counties, which will be included in the May 2015 lease sale. All parcels are in rural settings and most are distant from even small communities. The 2 Huerfano county parcels are located on and adjacent to Mount Mestas in the Sangre De Christo range in south-central Colorado, the 2 Las Animas County parcels are located in low elevation pinyon/juniper hills in southeastern Colorado, and the Weld County parcels are situated in the northeastern plains of Colorado, a patchwork of dry land farming and uncultivated short grass prairie. 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 EA identifies indirect impacts from leasing as a result of potential future impacts from development of those leases at the APD stage. None of the environmental effects associated with offering the proposed lease parcels for sale, as discussed in detail in the EA, were determined to be significant, nor do the effects exceed those described in the Royal Gorge and Northeast RMPs and their respective FEISs.

Public health and safety: 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 RMP/FEIS. Oil and gas exploration and drilling operations are regulated for health and safety through other agencies of local, State and Federal government. 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. A decision to lease would not limit later resource management decisions for areas open to development proposals.

Consideration of whether the action is related to other actions with cumulatively significant impacts: The EA did not identify any significant cumulative effects beyond those already analyzed in the Royal Gorge and Northeast RMPs/FEISs. The interdisciplinary team evaluated the lease sale in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions.

Scientific, cultural or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places: Because the proposed lease sale does not involve ground disturbance, the proposed undertaking will have no effect on historic properties. Any future development of parcels that are purchased as a result of the lease sale will be subject to additional 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: 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:
FIELD MANAGER REVIEW:
DATE:

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: _____
Deputy State Director
Division of Energy, Lands and Minerals

DATE SIGNED: _____