ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR BURLINGTON RESOURCES OIL AND GAS COMPANY, LP
SAN JUAN 30-6 UNIT 15C WELL PAD, ACCESS ROAD, AND PIPELINE TIE

BLM EA No. NM F010-2011-169

FEDERAL MINERAL LEASE NUMBER USA NM-012709

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BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
FARMINGTON FIELD OFFICE

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR

BURLINGTON RESOU RCES OIL AND GAS COMPANY, LP
SAN JUAN 30-6 UNIT lSC WELL PAD, ACCESS ROAD, AND PIPELINE TIE

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Burlington Resources Oil and Gas Company, LP (Burlington), has filed an Application for Permit to Drill (APD) with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Farmington Field Office (FFO) for the construction, drilling, production, and final abandonment of a Blanco Mesaverde/Basin Dakota natural gas well, the proposed San Juan (SJ) 30-6 Unit 15C, and associated access road. In addition, Enterprise Field Services, LLC (Enterprise), has proposed construction, operation, and final abandonment of the associated pipeline tie. It is anticipated that if the APD is approved, construction of the proposed well would commence following approval. The proposed well would be drilled and located on federal mineral lease number USA NM-012709, issued October 01, 1949.

The proposed project area (PPA) is located in Rio Arriba County in the San Juan Basin in northwestern New Mexico. The PPA is approximately 14 miles northeast of the town of Blanco, New Mexico, 2 miles southeast of the Navajo Reservoir Dam (Figure 1.1). In general, the PPA would be accessed east ofNew Mexico Highway 539. There are two potential surface locations for this proposed well, approximately 0.30 mile apart. Both potential surface locations were surveyed and are analyzed in this environmental assessment (EA) as Alternative B – Proposed Action and Alternative C – Alternate Location. The legal description of the PPA is Section 29, Township 30 North, Range 7 West. The footages for Alternative Bare 751 feet from south line and 1,656' feet from east line, and the footages for Alternative C are 1,209 feet from south line and 10 feet from east line. Where differences between the alternative locations arise, the text specifies which potential location is being discussed.

SWCA Environmental Consultants (SWCA) conducted a biological survey of each potential location and the survey results are incorporated within the appropriate sections of this EA. Additionally, Western Cultural Resources Management (WCRM) prepared a Cultural Resources Inventory (CRI) for the proposed locations, which is on file with the BLM FFO. Photographs of the PPA are included in Appendix A. A complete set of surveys, plats, maps, and driving directions for both action alternatives are included in Appendix B. Applicable laws and regulations pertaining to the Proposed Action are included in Appendix C.

This EA complies with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and federal regulations fotmd in 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Chapter V, and 43 CFR 4.413. The project record contains an interdisciplinary analysis to support the findings in this document and is located at the BLM FFO. This EA analyzes the site-specific impacts associated with the Proposed Action and its alternatives, identifies mitigation measures to

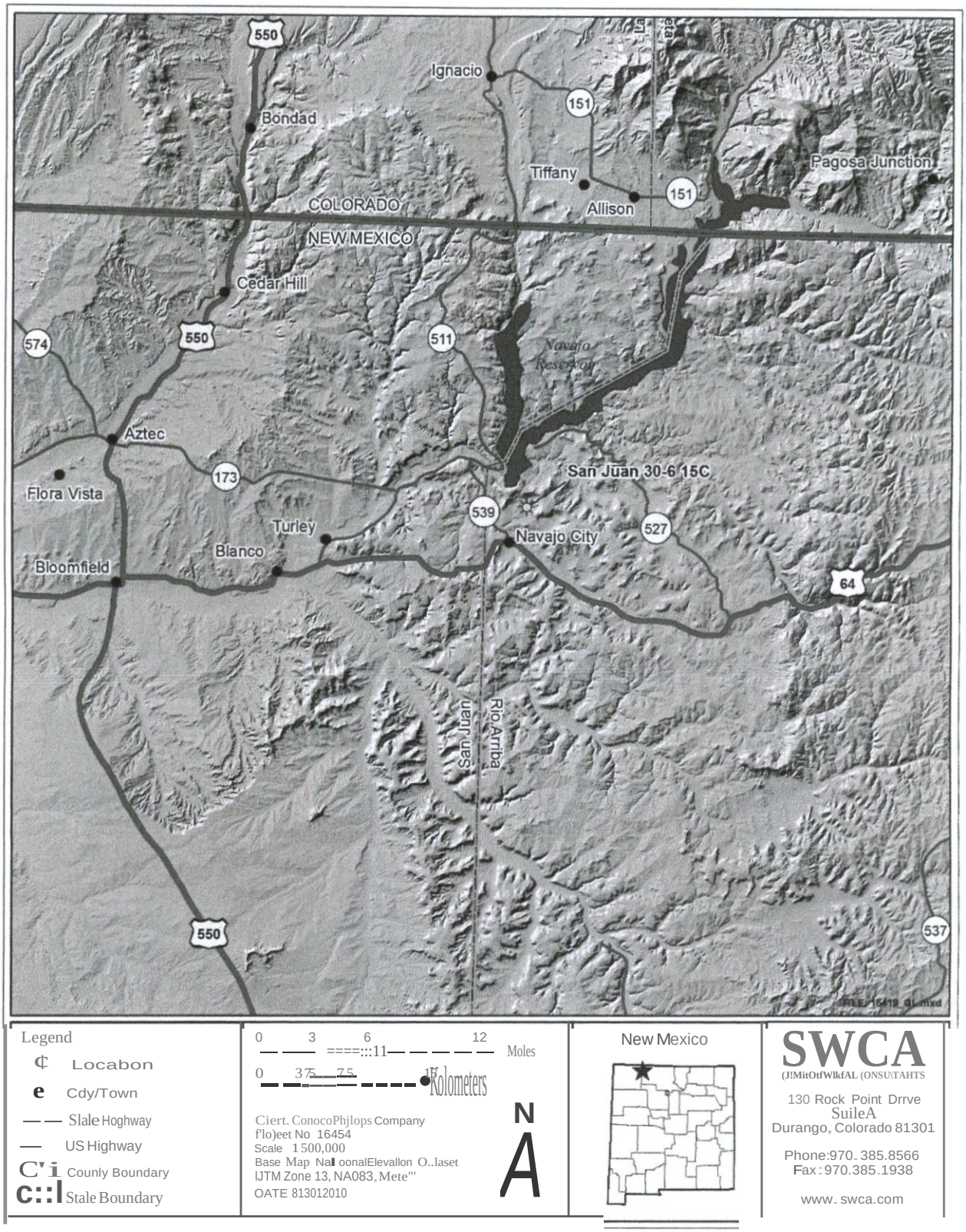

Figure 1.1. General project location map.

potentially reduce or eliminate those impacts, and provides agency decision-makers with detailed information upon which to approve or deny the Proposed Action or an alternative.

1.1 Decision To Be Made

The Onshore Oil and Gas Order 1 (specifically, 43 CFR Part 3160 subpart 3161.2) requires the BLM Responsible Official to approve, inspect, and administer operations subject to the regulation and to require that all such operations, among other requirements, "be conducted in a manner which protects other natural resources and the environmental quality." This regulation establishes procedures for obtaining approval of an APD on existing onshore federal and Indian oil and gas leases and requires a specific Surface Use Plan of Operations (SUPO) for each APD submitted for approval. The plan must address 13 specific points concerning use of the surface (43 CFRPart3160).

The analyses contained in this EA will provide information needed by the BLM Manager as the Responsible Official to detennine whether the Proposed Action or alternative may have significant impacts and would require an environmental impact statement (EIS). If it is determined that the impacts would not be significant, the Responsible Official will decide what Conditions of Approval (COAs) will be required with the proposed SUPO. The Responsible Official must also determine whether the decision is in conformance with the Resource Management Plan (RMP) (as amended) (BLM 2003a).

The Responsible Official will decide whether

- to approve the APD as submitted using the mitigation contained in the SUPO; or
- to approve the APD with additional modifications, mitigation, and COAs; or
- to not approve the APD and to analyze the effects in an EIS.

1.2 Purpose and Need

The BLM is considering approval of exploration and production of the subject lease because the activity is an integral part of the BLM's oil and gas leasing program under authority of the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 (as amended), Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, and Federal Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act of 1987. An approved APD, issued by the BLM, would authorize Burlington to construct and drill the proposed well and install necessary facilities, and ultimately responsibly abandon the endeavor. The associated pipeline tie, authorized by a right-of-way grant to Enterprise, would allow natural gas to be produced from the proposed well.

Federal oil and gas lease USA NM-012709 conveys the right to use, in an environmentally responsible manner, the portion of the surface necessary to efficiently develop the leased federal minerals. The purpose of and need for the Proposed Action are to allow for development of the existing lease rights while protecting the surface resources to the maximum extent possible. The Proposed Action could help meet the public's increasing demand for oil and gas resources. The Proposed Action would exercise Burlington's existing right to drill for, extract, remove, and market natural gas produced from the proposed well. As part of these valid existing rights, Burlington must also reclaim disturbed areas and strive to minimize impacts to other resources.

The Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, as amended, authorizes the BLM to issue federal oil and gas leases for mineral extraction. A federal lease is a binding legal contract that allows the leaseholder to develop the federal mineral estate. subject to the terms and stipulations of the lease instrument and current laws and regulations. Oil and gas exploration and development arc recognized as an appropriate use of public lands by the BLM FFO's RMP (BLM 2003a), which provides management direction for the leased area. The BLM will consider approval of the proposed drilling in a manner that avoids or reduces impacts to other resources, is consistent with the lease rights granted to the applicant, and prevents unnecessary or undue degradation of public lands.

1.3 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plan

This EA addresses the resources and impacts on a site-specific basis as required by NEPA. Pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28 and 1502.21, this site-specific EA tiers to the information and analysis contained in the BLM FFO's Proposed Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (PRMP/FEIS) (BLM 2003b). In particular, the cumulative impact analysis contained in the PRMP/FEIS, coupled with the level of development proposed by the Reasonably Foreseeable Development (RFD) scenario developed for the BLM FFO RMP (BLM 2003a), accounts for the broader impacts of oil and gas development (Engler et al. 2001). Tiering to a NEPA document that contains broader impact analysis allows the BLM to consider a more defined range of alternatives for the Proposed Action. Seeping conducted during the development of the RMP is also brought forward, as it allows the BLM to focus on the site-specific issues or concerns of the Proposed Action or an alternative.

The Proposed Action conforms to the objectives of the PRMP/FEIS, which states that it is "the policy of the BLM to make mineral resources available for disposal and to encourage development of mineral resources to meet national, regional, and local needs" (BLM 2003b:2-1). The BLM FFO completed the RMP by signing the Record of Decision on September 29, 2003 (BLM 2003a). The RMP provides for the integrated multiple use and sustained yield of resources for the planning area.

By federal law, the government must abide by the terms, conditions, and provisions agreed to when federal lease USA NM-012709 was issued. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1500.3) state that parts 1500 through 1508 of this title provide regulations applicable to and binding for all federal agencies for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA "except where compliance would be inconsistent with other statutory requirements."

Recent changes in New Mexico Oil Conservation Division (NMOCD) regulations that were not in effect for consideration during the 2003 RMP process must also now be included in the analysis of natural gas development projects. Most relevant, 19.15.17 New Mexico Administrative Code (the "Pit Rule") regulates permitting, construction, operation, and subsequent closure of temporary pits within NMOCD District 3. The Proposed Action analyzed in this EA would be consistent with the Pit Rule and the applicable Memorandum of Understanding between the BLM FFO and the NMOCD, signed May 5, 2009.

Additionally, the APD operator and right-of-way grant holder are required to

comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations (a listing of selected federal laws and regulations applicable to the Proposed Action can be found in Appendix C);

obtain the necessary permits for the drilling, completion, and production of this well, including water rights appropriations, permits for installation of water management facilities, water discharge permits, and relevant air quality permits; and

implement the Proposed Action or alternative in a way that is as consistent as possible with local, county, or state plans.

1.4 Scoping and Issues/Concerns

Appropriate scoping helps identify resources that could be impacted, reducing the chances of overlooking a potentially significant issue or reasonable alternative. The BLM has extensive experience with similar projects in the general vicinity of the PPA. Because external scoping was completed during the PRMP/FEIS process, additional formal external scoping was not conducted for this project. Public involvement to raise any site-specific concerns for this Proposed Action was initiated by posting the legal description of the PPA on the BLM FFO website. During the on-site inspection— which was attended by resource specialists familiar with the issues and resources of the area, including representatives from the BLM, SWCA, and Burlington— any relevant issues or concerns were discussed and subsequently brought forward for detailed analysis in this EA.

The following resources will be discussed in detail: air resources, cultural resources, invasive and non-native plant species, livestock grazing, migratory birds, mineral resources, noise, public health and safety, recreation, socioeconomics, soils, special management species, vegetation, visual resources, water quality (surface and ground), and wildlife. Required resource inventories for threatened and endangered species and cultural resources have been completed for Alternatives B and C and the results are incorporated herein.

1.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the purpose and need of the Proposed Action, as well as the relevant issues, i.e., those elements of the human environment that could be affected by the implementation of either action alternative. In order to meet the purpose and need in a way that resolves the relevant issues, the BLM has worked with the proponent to develop a Proposed Action Alternative that already incorporates much of the necessary mitigation. A No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action, and Alternate Location alternative are presented in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 presents the affected environment but is limited to the discussion necessary to understand the effects of the alternatives. The potential environmental impacts or consequences resulting from the implementation of each alternative are then analyzed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 2 – Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action

When providing an EA under NEPA, federal agencies are only required to analyze alternatives to a Proposed Action when there is an unresolved conflict concerning alternative uses of available resources. Accordingly, for this Proposed Action, the BLM has rigorously explored and objectively evaluated all reasonable alternatives that meet the underlying need for the Proposed Action and resolve any resource conflicts. The following discussion includes three alternatives: Alternative A – No Action, Alternative B – Proposed Action, and Alternative C – Alternate Location. Under Alternative A, the proposed well would not be approved by the BLM; therefore, cuiTent uses in the PPA would continue. As such, this alternative provides baseline data and serves as the basis for analysis of potential resource impacts for Alternatives B and C.

Alternative B is a directional drill and requires a 339-foot access road with collocated pipeline tie. Alternative C is also a directional drill and requires a 152-foot access road and 434-foot pipeline tie. Both alternatives include built-in mitigation measures. Alternative C is the operator's preferred alternative. Table 2.1 compares the disturbance from each alternative.

Table 2.1. Comparison of New Disturbance from each Alternative

Facility	Total Acres Immediately Disturbed	Acres of Disturbance after Initial Reclamation	Acres of Disturbance Following Final Abandonment
Alternative A – No Action			
Well Pad	0.00	0.00	0.00
Collocated Access Road and Pipeline (poly-pipe)	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	0.00	0.00	0.00
Alternative B – Proposed Action			
Well Pad	3.03	1.00*	0.00
Collocated Access Road and Pipeline {poly-pipe)	0.39	0.15	0.00
Total	3.42	1.15	0.00
Alternative C – Alternate Location			
Well Pad	3.03	1.00*	0.00
Collocated Access Road and Pipeline (poly-pipe)	0.49	0.07	0.00
Total	3.52	1.07	0.00

• Total area disturbed after initial reclamation is based on an industry average obtained from the operator. Actual disturbance to the well pad following successful initial reclamation may be less than 1.00 acre (personal communication, Virgil Chavez 2008).

2.1 Alternative A – No Action

The BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1 (BLM 2008a:50) states that for EAs on externally initiated proposed actions, the No Action Alternative generally means that the proposed activity would not be approved (BLM 2008a:52). This option is provided in 43 CFR 3162.3-1 (h)(2). Under this alternative, the BLM would deny the approval of the proposed APD, Burlington would retain its lease rights, and gas production in the area would continue at its current rate. If the APD is not approved, natural gas would not be extracted from the proposed well, the associated surface disturbance would not occur, and livestock grazing, hunting, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) uses in the area would continue to occur. The construction of the well, access road, and pipeline, production of natural gas from this well, and the final abandonment of the well and pipeline *would* not occur. The No Action Alternative is presented for baseline analysis of resource impacts.

2.2 Alternative B – Proposed Action

Project Description

Burlington has proposed the construction, drilling, production, and final abandonment of a Blanco Mesaverde/Basin Dakota natural gas well, the proposed SJ 30-6 Unit 15C, and an associated access road. Enterprise has proposed construction, operation, and final abandonment of the associated pipeline tie. The proposed well location can be found on the 1973 U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Navajo Dam, New Mexico, 7.5-minute topographic quadrangle map (USGS 2009).

The PPA is located completely within Rio Aniba County on BLM lands, with federal minerals administered by the BLM FFO. The surface location for Alternative B would be 751 feet from south line and 1,656 feet from east line of Section 29, Township 30 North, Range 7 West. The well pad (center stake) is at an elevation of6,303 feet above mean sea level (amsl).

Under Alternative B, the dimensions of the SJ 30-6 Unit 15C well pad would be 230 x 300 feet, plus a 50-foot construction buffer on all sides resulting in approximately 3.03 acres of surface disturbance (Figure 2.1). The 50-foot buffer and areas of the well pad not needed for production would be reclaimed after successful initiation of the well production phase. Approximately 339 linear feet of new access road to the proposed well with collocated pipeline tie would be required. The proposed collocated pipeline and access road would total approximately 0.39 acre of disturbance.

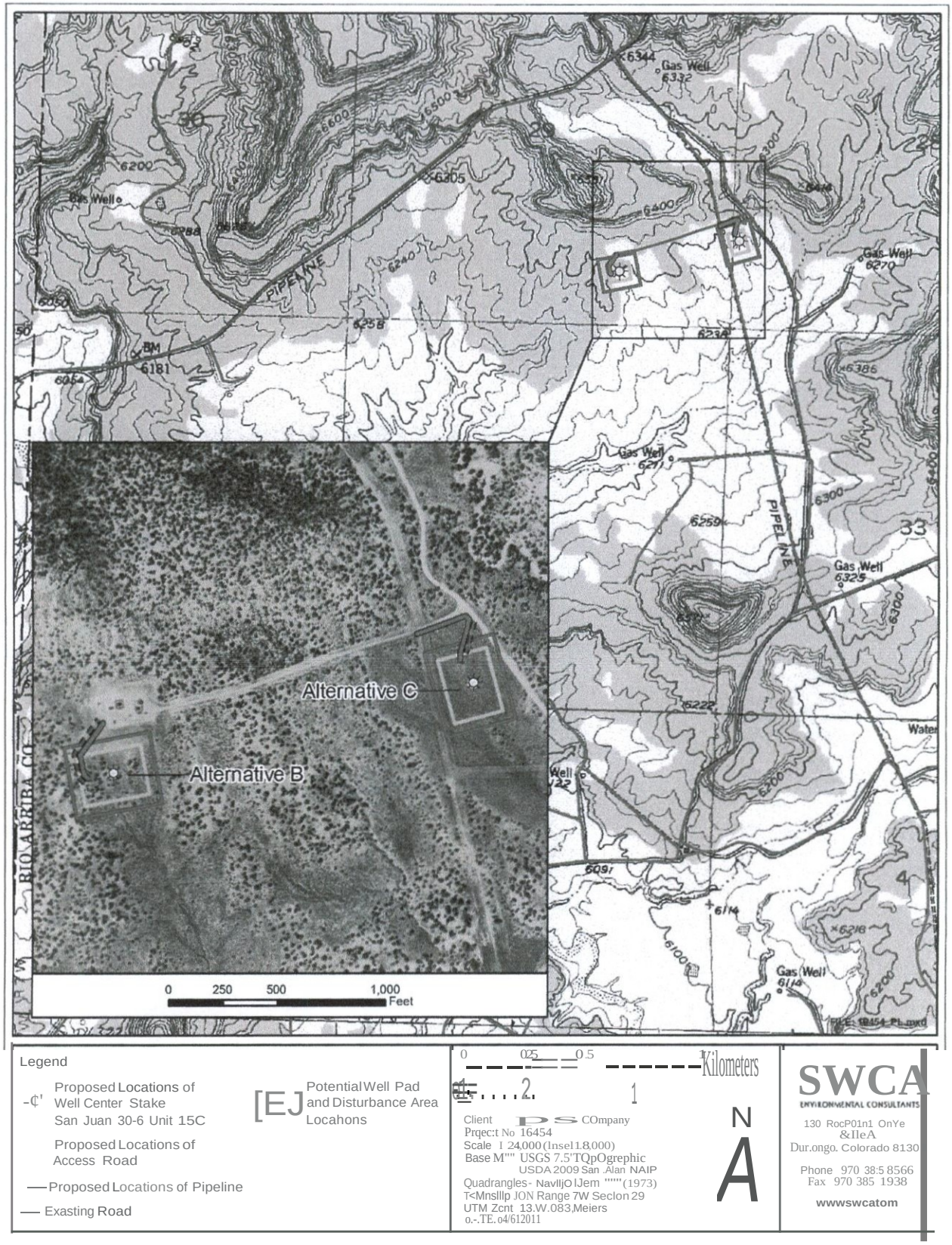

Figure 2.1. Project location map showing Alternatives B and C.

2.3 Alternative C – Alternate Location

The proposed well location for Alterative C is approximately 0.30 mile directly east of the location for Alternative B (see Figme 2.1). Under Alternative C, the well would be directionally drilled into the Blanco Mesaverde/Basin Dakota Formation. The surface location for Alternative C would be 1,209 feet from south line and 10 feet from east line, Section 29, Township 30 North, Range 7 West. The well pad (center stake) would be at 6,288 feet amsl. A complete set of surveys, plats, maps, and driving directions for Alternative C is included within Appendix C.

Project construction and surface occupancy would be largely the same as Alternative B. The maximum surface disturbance associated with Alternative C would be approximately 3.52 acres. The proposed well pad would measure 230 x 300 feet, plus a 50-foot-wide construction zone around the perimeter of the well pad, for a total of approximately 3.03 acres. The 50-foot buffer would be reclaimed after successful initiation of the well production phase. An approximately 152-foot proposed access road and a 434-foot buried pipeline tie would be constructed totaling approximately 0.49 acre.

Project construction, production, and abandonment phases would be the same as Alternative B. The mitigation measures specified for Alternative B would also apply to Alternative C.

Project Construction

Under the Proposed Action, a 230 x 300-foot well pad and buffer zone would be constructed using a D-8 bulldozer. Clearing for the well pad would be necessary to provide space and a level surface for a drilling rig, completion rig, and other heavy equipment to safely access and drill the well. The cuts and fills and topsoil storage would be contained within the construction buffer. Road-related constiuction would involve blading with a bulldozer to create the roadbed. The portion of the pipeline not located under the well pad would be located in the access road right-of-way, and the trench would be dug using a backhoe or trencher. Mitigation measures recommended for the Proposed Action would be implemented as COAs attached to the approved APD. Similarly, recommended mitigation measures would be implemented as stipulations in the right-of-way grant. The Proposed Action includes the following built-in mitigation measures:

The top 6 inches of topsoil on the proposed well pad would be stockpiled on-site for redistribution during well pad reclamation.

- All aboveground production facilities would be low-profile and painted juniper green to blend with the surrounding environment.

All disturbed areas not needed for production would be revegetated usmg a ELM-approved seed mixture.

Culverts would be installed as necessary for proper drainage.

Silt traps would be installed as necessary to reduce erosion

The reserve pit would be designed and operated as prescribed in the well pad diagram (see Appendix B) and would be lined with an impervious 20 mil liner and then fenced. The reserve pit *would* be constructed in accordance with the Pit Rule and would be sited, fenced, revegetated, and marked as directed in that regulation.

A diversion ditch would be designed and constructed as prescribed by the BLM.

A compressor may also be required to pressurize gas for delivery to the transportation pipeline. If required, the compressor would conform to BLM FFO Noise Notice to Lessees (NTL) standards.

Compressor emissions would be limited to no more than 2 grams per horsepower hour of nitrogen oxides (NOx) for engines with 300 horsepower or less.

After the well pad is constructed, a drilling rig would be moved to the location and assembled. Drilling into the Blanco Mesaverde/Basin Dakota formations would require approximately 14 days. After the well has been drilled, completion would take approximately 14 additional days. The entire construction and drilling process is anticipated to take between four and eight weeks. During the construction, drilling, and completion phase, both heavy equipment and light vehicles would use existing BLM roads to access the well site. Traffic would include drilling rigs, large tractor-trailers, construction equipment, water trucks, drilling and production equipment and supplies, tanks, and various light pickup trucks.

Production Phase

If the well proves productive, the portion of the pad not required for production equipment and vehicular access would be reclaimed and seeded with a BLM-approved seed mix. Reclamation usually includes the portions of the pad outside the *teardrop--the* area encircled by the access road. The *teardrop* area would not be reclaimed until final abandonment of the well. Typical production equipment would be assembled on the well pad and includes the wellhead, production separator, a cathodic station, a meter run with electronic telemetry, and one to two 500-barrel storage tanks. A compressor may also be required to pressurize gas for delivery to the transportation pipeline. The compressor size would be dependent on production.

After production begins, normal maintenance would be required and would consist of one pickup truck visiting the well approximately every other day during the work week to check on production and resolve any problems that may occur at the well. Trucks would be used to remove wastewater stored in tanks on-site. The frequency of water hauling would depend on the amount of water the well produces and may vary from once a day to once a month. A work-over rig could occasionally be required for downhole maintenance. Surface impacts of a work-over rig would be similar to the effects described for drilling, although usually to a lesser degree. The estimated production phase is expected to last 20 to 30 years.

Abandonment Phase

When the well is no longer commercially viable, it would be plugged and abandoned according to BLM regulations and as specified by the BLM FFO in the COAs and right-of-way grant stipulations. Downhole well abandonment would be carried out under current BLM regulations for plugging of the well. Surface equipment would be removed, except for an aboveground marker that would contain well identification infonnation, including the location of the plugged hole. The underground pipeline tie is usually plugged and left in place. The well pad and access road, if not needed for other purposes, would be recontoured and revegetated as specified in the approved COAs and right-of-way grant stipulations. Final abandonment would be complete when successful reclamation of all disturbed areas is achieved to BLM Gold Book standards and guidelines.

2.4 Alternatives Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail

Alternatives to the Proposed Action are developed to explore different ways to accomplish the purpose and need while minimizing environmental impacts and resource conflicts and meeting other objectives of the RMP. Consistent with the BLM NEPA Handbook, the agency "need only analyze alternatives that would have a lesser effect that the proposed action" (BLM 2008a:80). Those with greater adverse resource impacts are not considered for this analysis. Alternative locations arc generally considered at the BLM on-site visit with the operator. Limitations of other nearby equipment, pipelines, access, and safety are considered, as well as resource conflicts that may require mitigation, such as rotating the well pad to protect cultural sites.

The SJ 30-6 Unit 15C well was staked three times. The first location was eliminated as the best possible location because the pad would not provide enough fill material to properly construct the pad and repair the existing access. In the course of the BLM onsite visits for this well, two other potential locations were identified and are analyzed in this EA as Alternatives Band C.

The Proposed Action is consistent with the goals and objectives of the RMP, which states that "dual completion, re-completion and commingling (both downhole and at the surface) will be encouraged and permitted in order to reduce the number of new well pads and consequent surface disturbance. This in turn, will reduce impacts to soils and vegetation, reduce air impacts caused by fugitive dust, reduce habitat fragmentation and offer less opportunity for the spread of noxious weeds" (BLM 2003a:4). No other resource conflicts, issues, or concerns were identified that would necessitate any additional alternatives. Therefore, only the No Action, Proposed Action, and Alternate Location alternatives have been analyzed in this document.

2.5 Consistency with Other Authorities

In addition to NEPA, other authorities have procedural requirements regarding the treatment of elements of the environment when the BLM is considering a federal action. Program-specific orders and Executive Orders (including the 14 listed in the BLM's NEPA Handbook H-1790-1 [BLM 2008a:Appendix 1]) have also been considered in preparation of this EA. Particularly relevant and supporting authorities are discussed below.

2.5.1 Clean Air Act

The Clean Air Act of 1970, as amended, establishes National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) to control air pollution. The New Mexico Air Quality Bureau (NMAQB) oversees air quality regulations and standards for stationary sources of air pollution. Impacts to air quality from oil and gas exploration and development are controlled by mitigation measures developed on a case-by-case basis. As part of the planning and decision-making process, the BLM must consider and analyze the potential effects of its activities on air resources. This EA discusses the contributions of the proposed project to regulated air pollutants and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and includes general discussion of potential impacts. Additional general information on air quality in the area is contained in Chapter 3 of the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2003b).

2.5.2 National Historic Preservation Act

Heritage resources are protected by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 (Public Law (PL) 89-665), as amended, and its implementing regulations (36 CFR 800), as well

as other legislation, including NEPA (PL 91-852) and its implementing regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508). Other relevant laws include the Antiquities Act of 1906 (PL 52-209), the Archaeological and Historical Conservation Act of 1974 (PL 93-291), the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) of 1979 (PL 96-95) and its regulations (36 CFR 296), the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (48 United States Code [USC] 1996), and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 (PL 101-601). Executive Order 11593 of 1971 also requires that cultural resources be protected. Compliance with Section 106 responsibilities ofthe NHPA is achieved by following the BLM–New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office protocol agreement, which is authorized by the National Programmatic Agreement between the BLM, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers.

2.5.3 Endangered Species Act

Threatened and endangered flora and fauna are protected under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), as amended (PL 94-325). Additionally, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) (16 USC 703–712), Executive Order 121186 for migratory bird protection, and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (16 USC 668-668d) protect other sensitive wildlife species that could occur in the PPA. BLM FFO staff has reviewed the Proposed Action and determined it would be in compliance with threatened and endangered species management guidelines outlined in the September 2002 Biological Assessment (Consultation No. 2-22-01-I-389) conducted for the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2003b). No further consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is required.

2.5.4 Clean Water Act

The Federal Water Pollution Control Act, commonly known as the Clean Water Act (codified at 40 CFR Part 112), protects surface water resources from pollution. Under Section 402 of the Clean Water Act (as amended), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was directed to develop a phased approach to regulate stormwater discharges under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program. Industrial activities disturbing land may require a NPDES permit for stormwater discharge. Depending on the acreage disturbed, either a Phase I industrial activity (5 or more acres of disturbance) or a Phase II small construction activities (between 1 and 5 acres of disturbance) permit may be required. Additionally, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Section 404 permit for the discharge of dredge and fill materials may also be required. Operators are required to obtain all necessary permits and approvals prior to any disturbance activities.

2.5.5 Execu.tive Order 12898

Executive Order 12898 of 1994, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations," requires federal agencies to ensure that proposed projects under their jurisdictions do not cause a disproportionate environmental impact that would affect any group of people because of a lack of political or economic strength. Environmental justice requires "the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, incomes, and educational levels with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies" (EPA 2008a).

Chapter 3 – Description of Affected Environment

This chapter describes the environment that would be affected by implementing the alternatives described in Chapter 2. For the purposes of providing baseline data for the affected environment and identifying potential impacts (see Chapter 4), a project area for each resource was delineated, as appropriate.

Aspects of the affected environment described in this chapter focus on the relevant major resources or issues/concerns. NEPA requires that the discussion of issues and concerns are commensurate with the potential impacts: "1500.4 (c) Impacts shall be discussed in proportion to their significance." Other CEQ regulations make it clear that discussion of all resources is not necessary, only those that are significant: "1501.7 (3) Identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3), narrowing the discussion of these issues in the statement to a brief presentation of why they will not have a significant effect."

Based on CEQ guidance and the January 2008 edition of the BLM NEPA Handbook, the following discussion will be limited to those resources that could be impacted to a degree that detailed analysis is warranted. However, certain elements of the human environment are required by statute, regulation, or executive order to be examined in all EAs (BLM 2008a:Appendix 1).

3.1 Resources Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

Several resources are not present within the PPA and therefore have not been brought forward for detailed analysis.

Floodplains, wetlands, and riparian zones-The location of floodplains, wetlands, and riparian zones would be clearly identified during the staking and scoping process and specifically located during on-site visits. These areas are to be avoided during drilling projects, are not located in the vicinity of the PPA, and are therefore eliminated from further analysis.

Prime and unique farmlands-According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), because of New Mexico's arid climate in agricultural areas, no lands within the state qualify as prime farmland unless they are irrigated with a dependable supply of irrigation water (NRCS 2009). No farmland occurs within the PPA or vicinity; therefore, farmlands (prime or unique) are eliminated from further analysis.

Wild and scenic rivers-There are two designated sections of wild and scenic rivers in New Mexico, both under the jurisdiction of the BLM Taos Field Office: one on the Rio Chama and one on the Rio Grande. As there are no designated rivers in areas under the jurisdiction of the BLM FFO, wild and scenic rivers are therefore eliminated from further analysis.

Wild horses and burros-There are two BLM wild horse and burro herd areas in New Mexico. One is west of Dulce on Carracas Mesa, and one is between White Sands and Socorro, well south of Albuquerque. Because there are no herd areas under the jurisdiction of the BLM FFO, wild horses and burros are therefore eliminated from further analysis.

Wilderness areas-There are four designated wilderness areas on BLM land in New Mexico: three are under the jurisdiction of the Rio Puerco Field Office in Albuquerque, and one, the Bisti/De-Na-Zin, is under the jurisdiction of the BLM FFO. The Bisti/De-Na-Zin Wilderness Area is 20 miles south of Farmington, and is therefore not in the vicinity of the PPA. Wilderness areas, including wilderness study areas, are therefore eliminated from further analysis.

Other resources with the potential to occur within the vicinity of the PPA that have not been brought forward for detailed analysis are listed below, along with supporting rationale.

3.1.1 Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act requires the BLM to give priority to designation and protection of any Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) during the land use planning process. An ACEC is an area within public lands where special management attention is required to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important resources or other natural systems or processes and protect life and safety from natural hazards. ACECs differ from other special management designations, such as wilderness areas, in that the ACEC designation, by itself, does not automatically prohibit other uses in the area.

The PPA is not within any ACEC. The nearest ACEC is the Frances Mesa ACEC, which is approximately 0.5 mile east of the PPA. The Frances Mesa ACEC is protected for its cultural values. As this ACEC is beyond the visual and auditory vicinity of the PPA, ACECs are therefore not analyzed for possible impacts in this EA.

3.1.2 Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898 requires federal agencies to assess projects to ensure there are no disproportionately high or adverse environmental, health, or safety effects on minority and low-income populations. Minorities, predominantly Native Americans and Hispanics, constitute a large portion of the population residing inside the boundaries of the BLM FFO's jurisdiction. The latest census data indicate that approximately 20.1% of Rio Arriba County's population is considered to be below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau 2011).

The PPA is in an established oil and gas area on public lands and no minority or low-income populations reside in the vicinity of the PPA. Therefore, the project would have no direct effect on any communities protected by Executive Order 12898. The project may have beneficial indirect effects, such as increased overall employment opportunities related to the oil and gas and service support industry in the region, as well as economic benefits for state and county governments from royalty payments and severance taxes. Any effects related to environmental justice would apply to all public land users in the PPA, not just low-income or minority populations. The project would have no disproportionately significant impact to any minority or low-income populations.

3.1.3 Threatened and Endangered Species

Under Section 7 of the ESA, as amended, the BLM is required to consult with the USFWS on any proposed action that may affect federally listed threatened or endangered species or species proposed for listing. The USFWS lists five species as threatened or endangered, three species as

candidate, and one proposed species that are known to occur, or have the potential to occur, in Rio Arriba County (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. USFWS-listed Species for Rio Arriba County, New Mexico

Common Name	USFWS Status	Habitat Associations	Potential to Occur in the PPA
Mammals			
Black-footed ferret *(Mustela nigripes)*	Endangered*	Dependent on extensive prairie dog colonies	No
New Mexico meadow jumping mouse *(Zapus hudsonius luteus)*	Candidate	Habitat specialist in perennial riparian areas with persistent emergent vegetation or willows/alders	No
Birds			
Yellow-billed cuckoo *(Coccyzus americanus)*	Candidate	Unfragmented, cottonwood riparian woodland with dense willow understory	No
Mountain plover *(Charadrius montanus)*	Proposed	Breeds on open plains at low to moderate elevations and agricultural lands, often associated with prairie dog colonies	No
Mexican spotted owl *(Sfrix occidentalis lucida)*	Threatened	Old-growth montane mixed coniferous forests	No
Southwestern willow flycatcher *(Empidonax traillii extimus)*	Endangered	Low-elevation riparian tree and shrub communities	No
Least tern *(Sterna antillarum)*	Endangered	Barren and sparsely vegetated sandbars along rivers	No
Fish			
Rio Grande silvery minnow[1] *(Hybognathus amarus)*	Endangered	Low-velocity water in pools and eddies over silt substrate	No
Rio Grande cutthroat trout *(Oncorhynchus clarki virginalis)*	Candidate	Mountain and foothill headwater streams and rivers	No

Source: USFWS (2011).
* Experimental population, non-essential.
[1] Western United States Distinct Population Segment.
Extirpated in Rio Arriba County.

SWCA conducted biological surveys of Alternative B (Proposed Action) on May 26, 2010, and of Alternative C (Alternate Action) on August 24, 2010. No USFWS-listed threatened or endangered species or their habitats were found in the PPA during the biological surveys. BLM FFO staff has reviewed the Proposed Action and determined it would be in compliance with threatened and endangered species management guidelines outlined in the September 2002 Biological Assessment (Consultation No. 2-22-01-I-389) conducted for the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2003b). No further consultation with the USFWS is required.

3.2 Resources Analyzed in Detail

Resources that could potentially be affected by the alternatives include air resources, cultural resources, invasive and non-native plant species, livestock grazing, migratory birds, mineral resources, noise, paleontological resources, public health and safety, recreation, socioeconomics, soils, special management species, vegetation, visual resources, water quality (surface and ground), and wildlife. These resources are discussed in detail below.

3.2.1 Air Resources

The proposed well is located in Rio Arriba County, New Mexico. Additional general information on air quality in the area is contained in Chapter 3 of the Farmington RMP/Environmental Impact Statement. In addition to the air quality information in the RMP cited above, new information about greenhouse gases (GHGs), and their effects on national and global climate conditions has emerged since this RMP was prepared. On-going scientific research has identified the potential impacts of GHG emissions such as carbon dioxide ($C0_2$) methane (CH4); nitrous oxide CN20); water vapor; and several trace gases on global climate. Through complex interactions on a global scale, GHG emissions may cause a net warming effect of the atmosphere, primarily by decreasing the amount of heat energy radiated by the earth back into space. Although GHG levels have varied for millennia (along with corresponding variations in climatic conditions), industrialization and burning of fossil carbon sources have caused GHG concentrations to increase measurably, and may contribute to overall climatic changes, typically referred to as global warming.

The 2003 RMP discussed ozone in the Baseline Air Quality and Impact Assessment sections. The National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) at the time was 0.084 ppm. In March of 2008, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a new primary 8-hour standard of 0.075 ppm.

Increased development in the Four Comers area including a proposed new coal fired power plant, increased oil and gas development, and population growth are all contributing to air quality concerns. Many residents are concerned with potential health impacts from other pollutants. An overall haze and plume of nitrogen oxides can often been seen in the skies, which impact visibility, and there are concerns for the ecosystem due to deposition of mercury and nitrogen.

In addition, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), on October 17, 2006, issued a final ruling on the lowering of the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for particulate matter ranging from 2.5 micron or smaller particle size. This ruling became effective on December 18, 2006, stating that the 24-hour standard for PM2.5, was lowered to 35 ug/m^3 from the previous standard of 65 ug/m^3. This revised PM2.5 daily NAAQS was promulgated to better protect the public from short-term particle exposure.

This EA incorporates an analysis of the contributions of the Proposed Action to GHG emissions, and a general discussion of potential impacts to climate.

Air quality and climate are the components of air resources, which include applications, activities, and management of the air resource. Therefore, the BLM must consider and analyze the potential effects of BLM and ELM-authorized activities on air resources as part of the planning and decision making process.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has the primary responsibility for regulating air quality, including seven nationally regulated ambient air pollutants. Regulation of air quality is also delegated to some states of which New Mexico is one. Air quality is determined by atmospheric pollutants and chemistry, dispersion meteorology and terrain, and also includes applications of noise, smoke management, and visibility. Climate is the composite of generally

prevailing weather conditions of a particular region throughout the year, averaged over a series of years. Greenhouse gases and the potential effects of GI-IG emissions on climate are not regulated by the EPA, however climate has the potential to influence renewable and non-renewable resource management.

3.2.1.1 .Air Quality

The area of the Proposed Action is considered a Class II air quality area. A Class II area allows moderate amounts of air quality degradation. The primary sources of air pollution are dust from blowing wind on disturbed or exposed soil and exhaust emissions from motorized equipment.

Air quality in the area near the proposed well is generally good and is not located in any of the areas designated by the Environmental Protection Agency as "non-attainment areas'' for any listed pollutants regulated by the Clean Air Act. During the summers of 2000 through 2002, ozone levels in San Juan County were approaching non-attainment. Additional modeling and monitoring was conducted by Alpine Geophysics, LLC and Environ International Corporations, Inc., in 2003 and 2004. Results of the modeling suggest the episodes recorded in 2000 through 2002 were attributable to regional transport and high natural biogenic source emissions. The model also predicted that the region will not violate the ozone NAAQS through 2007 and that the trends in the 8-hr ozone values in the region will be declining in the future. At the present time, San Juan County is classified as in attainment with the revised federal ozone standard of 0.075 ppm. Rio Arriba County is unclassified because of there are no ozone monitors sited in Rio Arriba County.

Greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide (C02) and methane (CH_4), and the potential effects of GHG emissions on climate, are not regulated by the EPA under the Clean Air Act. However, climate has the potential to influence renewable and non-renewable resource management. The EPA's Inventory of US Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks found that in 2007, total U.S. GHG emissions were over 7 billion metric tons and that total U.S. GHG emissions have increased by 17% from 1990 to 2007. Emissions increased from 2006 to 2007 by 1.4% (99.0 Tg C02 Eq.). The following factors were primary contributors to this increase: (1) cooler winter and warmer summer conditions in 2007 than in 2006 increased the demand for heating fuels and contributed to the increase in the demand for electricity, (2) increased consumption of fossil fuels to generate electricity and (3) a significant decrease (14.2%) in hydropower generation used to meet this demand (EPA 2009).

The levels of these GHGs are expected to continue increasing. The rate of increase is expected to slow as greater awareness of the potential environmental and economic costs associated with increased levels of GHG's result in behavioral and industrial adaptations.

3.2.1.2 Climate

Global mean surface temperatures have increased nearly 1.0°C (1.8°F) from 1890 to 2006 (Goddard Institute for Space Studies 2007). However, observations and predictive models indicate that average temperature changes are likely to be greater in the Northern Hemisphere. Without additional meteorological monitoring systems, it is difficult to determine the spatial and temporal variability and change of climatic conditions, but increasing concentrations of GHGs are likely to accelerate the rate of climate change.

In 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicted a warming of about 0.2°C per decade for the next two decades, and then a fw1her warming of about 0.1°C per decade. The National Academy of Sciences (2006) suppm1s these predictions, but has acknowledged that there are uncertainties regarding how climate change may affect different regions. Computer model predictions indicate that increases in temperature will not be equally distributed, but are likely to be accentuated at higher latitudes. Warming during the winter months is expected to be greater than during the summer, and increases in daily minimum temperatures are more likely than increases in daily maximum temperatures.

A 2007 US Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report on Climate Change found that, "federal land and water resources are vulnerable to a wide range of effects from climate change, some of which are already occurring. These effects include, among others: 1) physical effects such as droughts, floods, glacial melting, and sea level rise; 2) biological effects, such as increases in insect and disease infestations, shifts in species distribution, and changes in the timing of natural events; and 3) economic and social effects, such as adverse impacts on tourism, infrastructure, fishing, and other resource uses." It is not, however, possible to predict with any certainty regional or site specific effects on climate relative to the Proposed Action and subsequent actions.

In New Mexico, a recent study indicated that the mean annual temperatures have exceeded the global averages by nearly 50% since the 1970s (Enquist and Gori 2008). Similar to trends in national data, increases in mean winter temperatures in the southwest have contributed to this rise. When compared to baseline information, periods between 1991 and 2005 show temperature increases in over 95% of the geographical area of New Mexico. Warming is greatest in the northwestern, central, and southwestern parts of the state.

3.2.2 Cultural Resources

The SJ 30-6 Unit 15C well is located within the archeologically rich San Juan Basin. The pre-history of the San Juan Basin can be divided into five major periods: Paleoindian (ca. 10,000-5,500 B.C), Archaic (ca. 5,500 B.C.-A.D. 400), Basketrnaker II-III and Pueblo I–IV periods (A.D. 1–1540), and the historic (A.D. 1540-present), which includes Native American as well as later Hispanic and Euro-American settlers. Detailed descriptions of these various periods, and the select phases within each period, are provided in the BLM FFO's PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2003b).

The BLM FFO has categorized variability in archaeological sites by major time period, cultural affiliations/components, average size, and occurrence of features in each of the 20 cultural watersheds within the BLM FFO's jurisdiction (BLM 2003b:3-88). The SJ 30-6 Unit 15C is within the Gobernador watershed (BLM 2007a). Based on the PRMP/FEIS, a total of 1,163 sites representing 1,608 temporal/cultural components have been documented within the watershed (Science Applications International Corporation 2002:2-2; BLM 2003b:3-89). Of the 19 categories of sites defined (BLM 2003b:3-89) based on temporal/cultural affiliation, 16 are represented in the watershed. Lacking in the watershed are sites attributed to Paleoindian, Apache, and Pueblo occupations. The most frequently occurring sites with identifiable cultural affiliations recorded are historic Navajo Dinetah/Gobernador period components (41%) or prehistoric Anasazi Pueblo I period components (21%) (BLM 2003b:3-91).

The BLM FFO requires site-specific surveys in advance of oil and gas related ground-disturbing activities. Using available geographic information systems (GIS) data from the New Mexico Laboratory of Anthropology Archaeological Records Management Section (ARMS), 12 sites are documented within a 0.25-mile radius of the PPA (WCRM 2011). The figures are most likely higher because not all known surveys have been electronically captured in a GIS environment.

WCRM conducted a Class III CRI of the PPA on April 12, June 1, July 19, and December 10, 2010. A total of 24.1 acres was surveyed including the 50-foot construction buffer and a 100-foot cultural buffer zone. WCRM prepared a CRI report, which is on file with the BLM FFO, in accordance with *Procedures for Performing Cultural Resource Fieldwork on Public Lands in the Area of New Mexico BLM Responsibilities* (BLM 2005). The report documents the recording of one newly discovered archaeological site (LA 169355) and six isolated occurrences (lOs). The lOs represent nonsignificant resources and no further work is recommended for them. LA 169355 is recommended eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The site is located sufficiently distant from the PPA and no protective measures are warranted (WCRM 2011).

3.2.3 Invasive and Non-native Plant Species

Noxious weeds are officially designated as non-native plant species that are invasive and/or can become monocultures and cause harm to land value, native ecology, agricultural interests, wildlife habitat, livestock forage, riparian resources, and aesthetic and visual values of land. The New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA) has adopted a list of 37 species that are classified as noxious weed species (NMDA 2009).

During the biological survey of the Alternative B location, cheatgrass *(Bromus tectorum)* was observed throughout the PPA. During the biological survey of the Alternative C location, cheatgrass and Russian thistle *(Salsa/a tragus)* were observed in the PPA. Cheatgrass is regulated as a Class C noxious weed by the State of New Mexico (NMDA 2009).

3.2.4 Livestock Grazing

There are currently 167 grazing allotments managed by the BLM FFO, with 351 grazing authorizations that permit cattle, sheep, and horse grazing within the resource area. Of the 351 grazing authorizations, 317 are permitted under Section 3 of the Taylor Grazing Act. Of the 167 grazing allotments, there are four authorizations issued under Section 15 of the Taylor Grazing Act to the Navajo Tribe that authorizes grazing on 35 allotments. There are an additional 30 Section 15 authorizations that permit grazing on 30 allotments in the Lindrith, New Mexico, area (personal communication, Jeff Tafoya 2009).

The PPA is located within the BLM FFO Grazing Allotment Number 5089, permitted to Daniel Mufioz. The permit authorizes 75 cattle and two horses from November 1 through April 30, annually, at 47% federal range for 216 federal animal unit months (AUMs). During the well staking process, the grazing permittee is given the opportunity to voice any concerns about the proposed well location by responding in writing or in person and is invited to attend the staking and on-site meetings. The grazing permittee has not brought any issues or concerns forward. No permanent livestock water sources are within the immediate area of the PPA. Livestock may be present during construction of the Proposed Action or Alternative C and could be present during project operations.

3.2.5 Migratory Birds

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended, has established protections for migratory birds and their parts (e.g., eggs, nests, and feathers) from taking, hunting, capture, transport, sale, or purchase. The BLM FFO has developed a list of priority species of concern with the potential to occur in the PPA, based on the New Mexico Partners in Flight (NMPIF) *New Mexico Bird Conservation Plan* (NMPIF 2007) and the USFWS *Birds of Conservation Concern* (USFWS 2008). In addition, the BLM Instruction Memorandum released on February 22, 2010, establishes a consistent approach for addressing migratory bird populations and habitats when making project-level implementation decisions (BLM 2010).

Review of these documents, specifically as they pertain to the Colorado Plateau physiographic area, indicates that priority migratory bird species with a known range of distribution in the BLM FFO area include seven species that use Great Basin Desert Shrub (sage/grass) habitat and six that use Pinon-Juniper Woodland (pinon-juniper) habitat (the dominant vegetation types in and surrounding both alternatives) (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2. Priority Migratory Bird Species Identified for the BLM FFO

Species	Scientific Name	Habitat Type
Burrowing owl	*Athene cunicularia*	Sage/grass
Gray flycatcher	*Empidonax wrightii*	Pinon-juniper
Ash-throated flycatcher	*Myiarchus cinerascens*	Sage/grass
Cassin's kingbird	*Tyrannus vociferans*	Pinon-juniper
Loggerhead shrike	*Lanius ludovicianus*	Sage/grass
Gray vireo	*Vireo vicinior*	Pinon-juniper
Pinyon jay	*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*	Pinon-juniper
Juniper titmouse	*Baeo/ophus ridgwayi*	Pinon-juniper
Sage thrasher	*Oreoscoptes montanus*	Sage/grass
Bendire's thrasher	*Toxostoma bendirei*	Sage/grass
Black-throated gray warbler	*Dendroica nigrescens*	Pinon-juniper
Black-throated sparrow	*Amphispiza bilineata*	Sage/grass
Sage sparrow	*Amphispiza belli*	Sage/grass

Source: USFWS (2008), NMPIF (2007).

3.2.6 Mineral Resources

The PPA is in an area known to contain hydrocarbon-bearing formations and has established successful wells. There are no known gravel pits or mines in the area. The proposed well would be drilled into the Basin Dakota and Blanco Mesaverde fonnations. The Basin Dakota gas pool includes the Dakota Sandstone in the Basin Dakota Formation, which is the primary stratigraphic gas reservoir and is closely linked to the Mancos Shale hydrocarbons (Engler et al. 2001). The Basin Dakota pool was created in 1960 by consolidating numerous small Dakota reservoirs, and production has been attributed to reservoir heterogeneity or improved fracture stimulation techniques or a combination of both. In addition, the PPA is located in the northern portion of the

Blanco Mesaverde gas pool, separated on the basis of the "Chacra line" (Engler et al. 2001). A range of reservoir characteristics is possible for the Blanco Mesaverde reservoir, depending on location. In the northern portion, the Blanco Mesaverde reservoir includes the lower part of the Lewis Shale, Menefee Formation, Point Lookout Sandstone, and a portion of Mancos Shale. The Blanco Mesaverde reservoir was discovered in 1927 and is a likely target for commingling or dual completions, thereby reducing the impact of this development.

3.2.7 Native American Religious Concerns

Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs) is a term that has emerged in historic preservation management and the consideration of Native American religious concerns. TCPs are places that have cultural values that transcend, for instance, the values of scientific importance that are normally ascribed to cultural resources such as archaeological sites. The National Park Service has defined TCPs as follows:

> A traditional cultural property can be defined generally as one (a property) that is eligible for the National Register because of its association with cultural practices or beliefs of a living community that (a) are rooted in that community's history, and (b) are important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community. (Parker and King 1998: I)

Native American cultural associations are the "communities" most likely to identify TCPs, although TCPs are not restricted to this group. Some TCPs are well known, while others may only be known to a small group of traditional practitioners, or otherwise vaguely known.

There are several laws or Executive Orders that should be considered when evaluating Native American religious concerns. These govern access and use of sacred sites, possession of sacred items, protection and treatment of human remains, and the protection of archaeological resources ascribed with religious or historic importance. These include the following:

- The American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (42 USC 1996, PL 95-431 Statute 469).
- Executive Order 13007 (24 May 1996).
- NAGPRA of 1990 (25 USC 3001, PL 101-601).
- ARPA of 1979 (16 USC 470, PL 96-95).

For the Proposed Action, identification of TCPs was limited to reviewing existing published and unpublished literature and the site-specific CRI conducted for the Proposed Action. In addition, the BLM's archaeologist was contacted for inf01mation regarding the presence of TCPs identified, through the BLM's tribal consultation. There are no TCPs in the vicinity of the PPA (BLM 2011).

3.2.8 Noise

No background noise studies have been conducted for the PPA. However, ambient noise in the PPA includes vehicular traffic along nearby access roads, airplanes, windmills, pumpjacks, hunters, and oil and gas exploration and development activities. There are no residences or private land located within the PPA, and the nearest receptor point is considered to be the Navajo Lake Horse Trail, 0.5 mile away. Noise levels in the PPA are generally low (50–60 decibels [dB]) and fluctuate with variations in weather conditions, including temperature, wind, humidity,

and the general topography of the area. The noise level at the well site attenuates with distance from the noise source (equipment) so that at less than 0.25 mile the noise level is often low (30-40 dB) (SWC!\. 2009).

3.2.9 Paleontological Resources

The PPA is located within the paleontologically rich area of the San Juan Basin of northern New Mexico. The BLM's Potential Fossil Yield Classilication (PFYC) (BLM 2007b) system is a predictive modeling tool that was developed to provide baseline guidance for assessing and mitigating paleontological resources. The PFYC system is intended to be used at an intermediate point in analyses and should be used to assist in determining the need for further mitigation assessment or actions. The PFYC system is based on the fact that occurrences of paleontological resources are often closely tied to the geologic units that contain them, although it is recognized that local differences have to be taken into account. Using the PFYC system, geologic units are classified based on the relative abundance of vertebrate fossils or scientifically significant invertebrate or plant fossils and their sensitivity to adverse impacts.

The PPA is within the Nacimiento Formation, a geologic unit that the BLM has ranked within the BLM FFO management area as having very high paleontological sensitivity (PYFC Class 5, BLM 2008b), which could require project-specific assessments. During the planning process that resulted in the current RMP, the BLM FFO recognized nine Specially Designated Areas (SDAs) (more than 135,000 acres) in order to preserve important paleontological resources for scientific study and other public benefits (BLM 2003b:4-117). Based on local knowledge of the area from numerous similar projects, the analyses conducted for the 2003 RMP, and the fact that the PPA is not located within an SDA for paleontology, there are few paleontological resources assumed to be in the PPA; therefore, the BLM does not require a site-specific paleontological survey of the PPA.

3.2.10 Public Health and Safety

The proposed project would be located in an area with established oil and gas exploration and development operations with the accompanying transmission pipelines, drilling rigs, pumpjacks, traffic, and other related activities. In addition, welding equipment, heavy machinery, and deep trenches may exist during construction of the proposed project. These physical hazards could pose a threat to public health and safety.

There are no known residential dwellings in the vicinity of the PPA, and the closest town is Blanco, New Mexico, approximately 14 miles away. A small number of seasonal recreation users (i.e., OHV riders and hunters) may occasionally use or be in the vicinity of the PPA; however, these users are warned about possible hazardous conditions in the PPA and have limited access during construction (4-8 weeks per well) through posted signs and from the producing rigs during operation.

3.2.10.1 Hazardous and Solid Waste Materials

The Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) passed in 1976, establishes a comprehensive program for managing hazardous wastes from the time they are produced until their disposal. The EPA regulations define solid wastes as any "discarded materials" subject to a number of exclusions. A "hazardous waste" is a solid waste that 1) is listed by the EPA as a

hazardous waste, 2) exhibits any of the characteristics of hazardous wastes (ignitability, corrosivity, reactivity, or toxicity), or 3) is a mixture of solid and hazardous waste.

A 1980 amendment to RCRA conditionally exempted from regulation as hazardous wastes, "drilling fluids, production waters, and other wastes associated with the exploration, development, or production of crude oil or natural gas." On July 6, 1988, the EPA determined that oil and gas exploration, development, and production wastes would not be regulated as hazardous wastes under the RCRA. A simple rule of thumb was developed to determine whether exploration, development, and production waste is likely to be considered exempt or non-exempt from RCRA regulations. If I) the waste came from downhole or if 2) the waste was generated by contact with the oil and gas production stream during removal of produced water or other contaminants, the waste is most likely to be considered exempt by the EPA.

The Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), passed in 1980, deals with the release (spillage, leaking, dumping, accumulation, etc.) or threat of a release of hazardous substances into the environment. Despite many oil and gas constituent wastes being exempt from hazardous waste regulations, certain RCRA-exempt contaminants could be subject to regulations as hazardous substances under CERCLA. The NMOCD administers hazardous waste regulations for oil and gas activities in New Mexico.

Typical wastes associated with the Proposed Action and Alternative C include trash, sanitary wastes, produced water, and produced hydrocarbons. Based on the above discussion, these are generally exempt from RCRA. Sanitary wastes come from 15 to 20 people working for four to eight weeks, and sanitary wastes are expected during the production phase. Trash would be generated during drilling and completion work (4-8 weeks) and would be contained in containers so that debris does not get scattered by wind or small animals. During drilling and completion, a trash receptacle and a chemically treated portable toilet would be on location for trash and sanitary waste disposal. No garbage containers would be located on-site during the production phase. Drilling fluids, production waters, and other wastes associated with the exploration, development, or production of crude oil or natural gas would be placed in tanks or in a lined reserve pit on location during completion work.

3.2.11 Recreation

The PPA is located within the Navajo Lake Horse Trail SDA, managed for equestrian recreational use on designated trails, routes, and areas. The entire SDA consists of 6,752 acres, with 5,657 acres managed by the BLM and 5,951 acres containing federal minerals. Oil and gas leasing and development are managed under Controlled Surface Use constraints. Management prescriptions specified in the RMP (BLM 2003b:C-118) that apply to the Proposed Action and its alternative are as follows:

> Controlled Surface Use constraints for new and existing oil and gas leases prescribe no new activity allowed for a distance of 150 feet from either side of the designated trail system. Exceptions granted by recreation staff on a case-by-case basis as determined by environmental review.

No construction, drilling, completion, plugging, or work-over activities are allowed when they would interfere with authorized recreation events and from November 1 through March 31 for bald eagle *(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)* protection.

- The PPA is managed as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class III.

The designated Navajo Lake Horse Trail is approximately 0.5 mile to the north and west of the PPA. The PPA is in an established oil and gas area, and recreationists are restricted from active construction sites within the area. Trail users would be restricted from the PPA during construction (4-8 weeks) by signs, and if necessary, from on-site equipment during production by protective fencing.

3.2.12 Socioeconomics

The PPA is located in Rio Arriba County, New Mexico. According to the 2007 U.S. Census estimate, New Mexico had a population of 1,969,915, with 40,678 persons residing in Rio Arriba County (down from 41,190 persons in 2000) (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). Rio Arriba County is approximately 5,858 square miles in area, with an estimated average of seven persons per square mile in 2009.

Rio Arriba County is predominately rural in character. In 2009, the county had a median household income of $42,514, and a per capita personal income of $19,134 (in 2009 inflation-adjusted dollars). This 2009 figure was 70.7% of the national average per capita income, which was $27,041, and 85.2% of the average per capita income for New Mexico, which was $22,461 (U.S. Census Bureau 2007).

Rio Arriba County is an integral part of the greater Four Comers region. As such, each community in this region is economically integrated with its surrounding communities. The nearest town that would potentially be affected by economic multipliers as a result of the Proposed Action is Blanco, located 14 miles from the PPA. Blanco has an estimated population of 1,301 and approximately 11 businesses (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). Current average income data for Blanco are not available.

3.2.13 Soils

The PPA is in the San Juan Basin, a large, depressed drainage basin in northwestern New Mexico and southwestern Colorado. The San Juan Basin is bordered by the Defiance Uplift and Chuska Mountains to the west, San Juan Dome to the north, Chaco Slope and Zuni Uplift to the south and the Nacimiento Uplift to the east. In total, the San Juan Basin covers a surface of approximately 4,600 square miles. The soils in the San Juan Basin were formed primarily from two kinds of parent material: alluvial sediment and sedimentary rock. The alluvial sediment is material that was deposited in river valleys and on mesas, plateaus, and ancient river terraces. The material has been mixed and sorted in transport and has a wide range of mineralogy and particle size. Sedimentary parent material consists mainly of sandstone and shale bedrock. These shale and resistant sandstone beds form prominent structural benches, buttes, and mesas bounded by cliffs. The soil composition in both Alternatives B and C is completely composed of Vessilla-Menefee–Orlie Complex, with I% to 30% slopes. This soil type is loam (NRCS 2010). The component of this soil type is described below.

The Vcssilla-Mcnclcc-Orlic Complex, found on 1% to 30% slopes, is composed of 45% Vessilla and similar soils, 25% Menefee and similar soils, 20% Orlie and similar soils, and 10% minor components. Vessilla soils arc located on breaks formed from slope alluvium over residuum derived from sandstone. This unit is well drained with a very low water capacity. This unit has moderate permeability and low shrink-swell potential. Menefee soils are located on breaks formed from colluvium over residuum derived from shale, with a 15% to 45% slope. These soils are well drained with a very low water capacity. Runoff for this unit is high and the shrink-swell potential is moderate. Orlie soils, located on summits of plateaus and mesas, are formed from slope alluvium derived from sandstone and shale. They have a 1% to 8% slope. This unit is well drained with a high available water capacity. Runoff for this unit is medium and permeability is slow. Minor components consist of Rock Outcrop, Pinavetes and similar soils, and Gobernador and similar soils. Rock Outcrop consists of barren or nearly barren areas of exposed bedrock on ridges, ledges, and escarpments. Pinavetes and similar soils comprise about 3% of the total acreage with a slope of 0% to 3%. Gobernador and similar soils comprise about 3% of the total acreage with a slope of 0% to 3%. The major limitation for this soil complex is water erosion (NRCS 2010).

3.2.14 Special Management Species

In accordance with *BLM Manual 68-10* (BLM 2008c), the BLM identifies special management species (not federally listed as threatened or endangered) for disturbance mitigation so that BLM-administered proposed actions do not contribute to the need to list those species as threatened or endangered in the future. Included in this category are state-listed endangered species and federal candidate species, which receive no special protections under the ESA.

The BLM FFO has identified 10 species as special management species (BLM 2008d). Of these, five have the potential to occur in the PPA and surrounding area (Table 3.3). Areas within and/or surrounding the PPA provide potential foraging habitat for American peregrine falcon *(Falco peregrinus anatum)*, ferruginous hawk *(Buteo regalis)*, golden eagle *(Aquila chrysaetos)*, bald eagle, and prairie falcon *(Falco mexicanus)*. The raptor nest data from the BLM FFO show two American peregrine falcon nests 9.7 miles southwest of Alternative B and 10.0 miles southwest of Alternative C, and two golden eagle nests 6.1 miles southwest of Alternative B and 6.4 miles southwest of Alternative C. There are several more golden eagle nests in the area. All other mapped nests are farther than 10 miles from the PPA. No raptors, nests, or signs of nests (e.g., whitewash) were observed within or in the vicinity of the PPA during field reconnaissance.

Table 3.3. Special Management Species Designated by the BLM FFO

Species	Habitat Associations	Potential to Occur in the PPA
Birds		
American peregrine falcon *(Falco peregrinus anatum)*	Found in a variety of habitats, mostly consisting of cliffs for nesting and open areas for foraging; uses large cities and nests on buildin s	Yes
Ferruginous hawk *(Buteo regalis)*	Open country, primarily prairies, plains and badlands; breeds in trees near streams or on steep slopes, sometimes on mounds in o en desert	Yes
Golden eagle *(Aquila chrysaetos)*	Generally open country, in prairies, tundra, open coniferous forest, and barren areas, especially in hilly or mountainous regions; nests on cliff ledges and in trees	Yes
Bald eagle	Forages mainly in rivers and large lakes; in open country,	Yes

Table 3.3. Special Management Species Designated by the BLM FFO

Species	Habitat Associations	Potential to Occur in the PPA
(Ha/iaeetus leucocepha/us)	typically close to water; nests in tall trees or cliffs	
Burrowing owl *(Athene cunicularia)*	Lives in dry, open areas with no trees and short grass, often in association with prairie dog towns; the nearest prairie dog town is 3.9 miles east-southeast of the PPA	No
Prairie falcon *(Falco mexicanus)* Mountain	Dry grasslands and prairies, locally alpine tundra; suitable breeding habitat usually requires cliffs for nest stes	Yes
plover *(Charadrius montanus)* Yellow-billed	Breeds on open plains at low to moderate elevations and agricultural lands, often associated with prairie dog colonies	No
cuckoo *(Coccyzus americanus)* Plants	Dense riparian thickets, willow stands, overgrown pastures and orchards	No
Aztec gilia		
(Aiiciella formosa) Brack's cactus	Salt desert scrub communities in soils of the Nacimiento Formation; 5,000-6,400 feet amsl	No
(Sc/erocactus c/overiae var. *brackit*	Sandy clay strata of the Nacimiento Formation in sparse shadscale scrub; 5,000-6,400 feet amsl	No

Source: BLM (2008d).

American Peregrine Falcon – Peregrine falcons occupy cliff nest sites and range widely during foraging. Peregrines primarily prey on aerial bird species, so their occurrence in the PPA is likely to pertain only to flying over the site. Three nests are mapped 9.7 miles southwest of Alternative B and 10.0 miles southwest of Alternative C according to the BLM database. No nests or individuals were detected during field survey for the PPA or vicinity.

Ferruginous Hawk – Ferruginous hawks typically nest on the top of trees (20–50 feet above ground), but may nest as low as 6 feet from the ground when suitable nest trees are not present. This species may also nest on cliffs or on the ground. Small- to medium-sized mammals make up the majority of their diet; thus, ferruginous hawks may use the PPA and vicinity for hunting. Rabbit *(Sylvilagus* sp. and/or *Lepus californicus)* scat was observed during the survey. No mapped nests exist within a 10-mile radius of the PPA according to the BLM database, and no nests or individuals were detected during field survey for the PPA or vicinity.

Golden Eagle – Like peregrine falcons, golden eagles typically nest on cliffs and may range miles during foraging. Two golden eagle nests are mapped 6.1 miles southwest of Alternative B and 6.4 miles southwest of Alternative C. No nests or individuals were detected during field survey for the PPA or vicinity.

Bald Eagle – In New Mexico, bald eagles occur casually to occasionally in summer, and they migrate and winter almost statewide throughout New Mexico. Main wintering areas include the San Juan, upper Rio Grande, upper and middle Pecos, Canadian, San Francisco, Gila, and Estancia valleys (Hubbard 1978). The species is primarily water-oriented, and the majority of the populations occurring in New Mexico are found near streams and lakes. Additionally, there are some dryland areas where these eagles occur regularly. The bulk of a bald eagle's diet is fish; however, they will also feed on waterfowl, small mammals (especially rabbits), and carrion. Each alternative is located 1.5 miles southeast of the Navajo Reservoir shoreline; therefore bald eagles may use the PPA and vicinity for flyovers or hunting.

Prairie Falcon Prairie falcons also nest on cliffs and conduct extensive foraging bouts. The species preys on rabbits, as well as other small mammals, and may use the PPA and vicinity for hunting. No nests are mapped within a 10-mile radius of the PPA according to the BLM database, and no nests or individuals were detected during field survey for the PPA or vicinity.

3.2.15 Vegetation

The vegetation within Alternative B is co-dominated by pmon-juniper woodland and big sagebrush *(Artemisia tridentata)* with a dense herbaceous understory. Canopy cover is open with approximately 100 mature pinon pine *(Pinus edulis)* and one-seed juniper *(Juniperus monosperma)* trees within the PPA, and additional immature trees, which would be removed during construction. The herbaceous understory is dominated by James' galleta *(Pleuraphis jamesii)*, blue grama *(Bouteloua gracilis)*, cheatgrass *(Bromus tectOJ'um)*, Indian paintbrush *(Castilleja* sp.), and mountain deathcamas *(Zigadenus elegans)*, but supports various other species of forbs and grasses.

The vegetation within Alternative C is dominated by big sagebrush with scattered pinon pine and one-seed juniper. There are approximately 10 immature pinon pine and one-seed juniper trees within the proposed well pad, which would be removed during construction. An additional 10 immature pinon trees would be removed along the pipeline. The herbaceous understory is dominated by James' galleta, blue grama, needle and thread *(Hesperostipa comata)*, Indian ricegrass *(Achnatherum hymenoides)*, and cheatgrass. Large colonies of whipple cholla *(Cylindropuntia whipplei)* are present. Various other species of forbs and grasses are also present.

The Southwest Regional Gap Analysis Program (SWReGAP) data indicate the following land vegetation cover types within Alternative B: Colorado Plateau Pinon-Juniper Woodland covers approximately 75%, Inter-Mountain Basins Shale Badland covers 20%, and Inter-Mountain Basins Big Sagebrush Shrubland covers approximately 5%; Alternative C is entirely covered by Colorado Plateau Pinon-Juniper Woodland. These land vegetation cover types have been defined by the SWReGAP and are described in more detail below (USGS 2004).

Colorado Plateau Pinon-Juniper Woodland – This ecological system occurs on dry mountains and foothills of the Colorado Plateau region from the western slope of Colorado to the Wasatch Range, south to the Mogollon Rim, and east into the northwest comer of New Mexico. These woodlands occur on warm, dry sites on mountain slopes, mesas, plateaus, and ridges and are typically found at elevations between 4,900 and 8,000 feet amsl. Severe climatic events that occur during the growing season, such as frosts and drought, are thought to limit the distribution of pinon-juniper woodlands to relatively narrow elevational belts on mountainsides. Soils that support this system vary in texture from stony, cobbly, gravelly sandy loams to clay loam or clay. Pinon pine and/or one-seed juniper dominate the tree canopy in the southern portion of the Colorado Plateau in northern Arizona and northwestern New Mexico. Understory layers are variable and may be dominated by shrubs and graminoids or may be absent. Associated species include manzanita *(Arctostaphylos* sp.), big sagebrush, mountain mahogany *(Cercocarpus montanus)*, blackbrush *(Coleogyne ramosissima)*, bitterbrush *(Purshia* sp.), Gambel oak *(Quercus gambelii)*, blue grama, and James' galetta.

Inter-Mountain Basins Shale Badland -_This widespread ecological system of the intermountain western United States is composed of barren and sparsely vegetated substrates (<10% plant cover) typically derived from marine shales but also includes substrates derived from siltstones and mudstones (clay). Landforms arc typically rounded hills and plains that form a rolling topography. The harsh soil properties and high rate of erosion and deposition are driving environmental variables supporting sparse dwarf-shrubs, e.g., mat saltbush *(Atriplex corrugata),* Gardner's saltbush *(Atriplex gardneri),* birdfoot sagebrush *(Artemisia pedatifida),* and herbaceous vegetation.

Inter-Mountain Basins Big Sagebrush Shrub/and – This ecological system occurs throughout much of the western United States, typically in broad basins between mountain ranges, plains, and foothills between 4,900 and 7,500 feet amsl. Soils are typically deep, well drained, and non-saline. These shrublands are dominated by big sagebrush. Scattered one-seed juniper, greasewood *(Sarcobatus vermiculatus),* and saltbush *(Atriplex* sp.) may be present in some stands. Yellow rabbitbrush *(Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus),* rubber rabbitbrush *(Ericameria nauseosa),* antelope bitterbrush *(Purshia tridentata),* and snowberry *(Symphoricarpos oreophilus)* may co-dominate disturbed stands. Perennial herbaceous components typically contribute less than 25% vegetative cover. Common graminoid species include Indian ricegrass, blue grama, thickspike wheatgrass *(Elymus lanceolatus),* Idaho fescue *(Festuca idahoensis),* needle and thread, basin wildrye *(Leymus cinereus),* western wheatgrass *(Pascopyrum smithii),* James' galetta, Sandberg bluegrass *(Poa secunda),* or bluebunch wheatgrass *(Pseudoroegneria spica!a).*

3.2.16 Visual Resources

VRM on public lands is conducted in accordance with *BLM Handbook 8410* (BLM 1986). The PPA is within the Navajo Lake Horse Trails SDA and is designated VRM Class III (BLM 2003a). The objective of Class III-designated lands is to

> partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to that 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 predominate natural features of the characteristic landscape. (BLM 1986:7)

The PPA is located on a shelf below Frances Mesa and southeast of Navajo Dam. The topographic pattern of the general area is varied, consisting of defined ridges, plateaus with steep to very steep slopes, and deep and relatively incised valleys and canyons. Elevations range from approximately 6,000 to 6,900 feet amsl. The elevation of the center stake of the proposed well pad is 6,224 feet amsl. The visual inventory is described through patterns of landform, water, vegetation, and land use. Water features consist of streams and rivers at the bottom of canyons. The vegetation communities are characteristic of arid climates and predominantly include pinon-juniper within the PPA. Photographs of the visual vegetation setting are provided in Appendix A.

Land uses in the area generally consist of oil and gas development, permitted livestock grazing, hunting, and OHV use. Visitors interested in the cultural heritage sites may be sensitive viewers and occasionally travel within the viewshed of the PPA. Colors and contrast in the landscape include a spectrum of greens and browns from the vegetation and ground. Human-made

structures, such as roads, reservoirs, and gas wells, arc visible in the surrounding landscape. Roadways, pipelines, well pads, water impoundments, and cleared vegetation inevitably draw visual attention to modifications to the landscape. The industrial components arc prevalent but do not dominate the landscape. The existing oil and gas infrastructure has been painted to blend with the surrounding vegetation and the well pads have been reseeded and reclaimed to a minimal surface area (i.e., the teardrop area encircled by the access road) after they were constructed. The Proposed Action and Alternative C would be consistent with existing infrastructure and modifications to the landscape.

3.2.17 Water Quality-Surface and Ground

The PPA is within the upper San Juan watershed, Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) 14080101, and is part of the larger San Juan River basin. The major river in the region is the San Juan River (located 2.0 miles northwest of the PPA). The San Juan River basin occupies the northwestern comer of the state. Natural surface waters in the area are intermittent streams or ephemeral flow channels located in arroyos, washes, and canyons that feed the San Juan River. The San Juan River drainage includes portions of northern New Mexico, southern Colorado, northeastern Arizona, and southeastern Utah.

The New Mexico Environment Department/Surface Water Quality Bureau (NMED/SWQB) monitors river basins periodically and conducted an intensive surface water quality survey of the San Juan River basin in 2002, sampling and analyzing this watershed at four assessment units, including Navajo Reservoir (NMED/SWQB 2008). Data from that effort, combined with data from the 1990 monitoring performed by the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Irrigation Water Quality Program, provided for impairment determinations of New Mexico water quality standards. Impairment for fecal coliform and sedimentation/siltation was identified for the San Juan River within HUC 14080101, as well as at other locations within the watershed. For the Upper San Juan watershed, the EPA and the NMED/SWQB have identified mercury, selenium, total fecal coliform, and sediment/siltation as the primary impairments to water quality. The BLM manages 31% of HUC 14080101, and oil and gas extraction was cited as one of 10 contributing sources of the overall impairment of the watershed. Additionally, portions of the San Juan River are listed on the New Mexico Fish Consumption Guidelines Due to Mercury Contamination (NMED/SWQB 2005).

Runoff from the PPA would head in a southerly direction, feeding into an ephemeral drainage and eventually draining into the Gobemador Canyon, a tributary to the San Juan River. Ephemeral flows are generally very poor-quality water as a result of the highly erosive and saline nature of the soils. Sparse vegetative cover, low water crossings, and unpaved roads contribute to the rapid runoff conditions that are characteristic of the area. Although ephemeral drainages are not assessed for water quality, they are tributaries to the San Juan River, which was designated as impaired for the relevant section in 2004 (assessment unit ID NM-2405_10) (NMED/SWQB 2005).

3.2.18 Wildlife

Priority wildlife management activities conducted by the BLM FFO include big game management and surveys to determine game population size and health. The protection and enhancement of wildlife habitat is accomplished through an aggressive program of habitat

Chapter 4 – Environmental Impacts

This chapter describes the potential impacts and potential mitigation for the resources described in Chapter 3 that would result from implementing the alternatives described in Chapter 2.

Alternative A – No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, the proposed well would not be dri!Jed. There would be no new impacts from oil and gas production to the resources in the PPA. If the proposed well is not approved, there would be no new surface disturbance and no construction and production equipment on-site and therefore no new impacts to air resources, cultural resources, livestock grazing, migratory birds, mineral resources, Native American religious concerns, paleontological resources, public health and safety, recreation, socioeconomics, soils, special management species, vegetation, visual resources, water quality, and wildlife as a result of those activities. Additionally, there would be no impacts to resources from the project due to increased noise or increased potential to spread invasive and non-native plant species. The No Action Alternative would result in the continuation of the current land and resource uses in the PPA and is being used as the baseline for comparison of alternatives.

Alternative B – Proposed Action and Alternative C – Alternate Location

A description of potential effects on individual resources as a result of approving either Alternative B – Proposed Action or Alternative C – Alternate Location are presented in the fo!Jowing text. Also described are potential mitigation measures that could be incorporated by the BLM as COAs attached to the permit if the decision-maker determines they are necessary.

4.1 Air Resources

4.1.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

4.1.1.1 Air Quality

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts to air quality levels within the PPA because there would be no additional surface disturbance or travel on existing roads related to construction or maintenance of the Proposed Action. If the Proposed Action is not approved, there would be no use of a drill rig, compressors, separators, or dehydrators and therefore no impact to the air quality.

Alternatives B and C

Air quality would temporary be directly impacted with pollution from exhaust emiSSIOns, chemical odors, and dust that would be caused by the motorized equipment used to construct the well pad, and by the drilling rig that would be used to drill the well. Dust dissemination would discontinue upon completion of the construction phase of the well pad. Air pollution from the motorized equipment would discontinue at the completion of the drilling phase of the operations. The winds that frequent the northwestern part of New Mexico generally disperse the odors and emissions. The impacts to air quality would be greatly reduced as the construction and drilling phases are completed. Other factors that currently affect air quality in the area include dust from livestock herding activities, dust from recreational use, and dust from use of roads for vehicular traffic.

improvement projects, designations of SDAs with wildlife-friendly management prescriptions, and the application of mitigation measures on key wildlife lands where oil and gas reserves are being developed. The PPA is not within an SDA for wildlife, and no special management actions are required, other than protection provided by non-discretionary law, regulation, or policy.

The BLM FFO's PRMP/FEIS contains a detailed description of wildlife species that are found within the entire planning area (BLM 2003b:3-40). Habitat utilization by mule deer *(Odocoileus hemionus)* and cottontail rabbit *(Sylvilagus* sp.) was observed by an SWCA biologist during surveys on May 26 and August 24,2010.

Over the last ten years, the leasing of Federal oil and gas mineral estate in Farmington Field Office has resulted in an average total of approximately 450 to 500 wells drilled on federal leases annually. These wells *would* contribute an incremental increase to the total emissions (including GHGs) from oil and gas activities in New Mexico.

Potential impacts of development could include increased airborne soil particles blown from new well pads or roads, exhaust emissions from drilling equipment, compressors, vehicles, and dehydration and separation facilities, as well as potential releases of GHG, NOx and VOCs during drilling or production activities. The amount of increased emissions cannot be quantified at this time since it is unknown how many wells might be drilled, the types of equipment needed if a well were to be completed successfully (e.g. compressor, separator, dehydrator), or what technologies may be employed by a given company for drilling any new wells. The degree of impact will also vary according to the characteristics of the geologic formations from which production occurs.

The reasonable and foreseeable development scenario developed for the Farmington RMP demonstrated 522 wells would be drilled annually for federal minerals. Current APD permitting trends within the field office confirm that these assumptions are still accurate. This level of exploration and production would contribute a small incremental increase in overall hydrocarbon emissions, including GHGs, NOx, and VOCs released into the planet's atmosphere. When compared to total national or global emissions, the amount released as a result of potential production from the proposed well would not have a measurable effect on climate change due to uncertainty and incomplete and unavailable information; therefore is not possible to determine the effects on climate change on a regional, national, or global scale.

Consumption of oil and gas developed from the proposed well is expected to produce GHGs, NOx and VOCs. Consumption is driven by a variety of complex interacting factors including energy costs, energy efficiency, availability of other energy sources, economics, demography, and weather or climate. Regional and global transportation, metropolitan traffic, fires (including wildfires, controlled burns and use of domestic fire places), and power plant emissions from the west are all parts of the equation. Regional air quality modeling conducted for the Northern San Juan Basin Coal Bed Methane FEIS Project in August 2006, determined that potential cumulative visibility impacts to Federal PSD Class I Areas (Mesa Verde National Park and the Weminuche Wilderness Area) could occur at some unspecified time in the future

The NAAQS are set for the most common and widespread pollutants. The standards are concentrations of air pollution above which the EPA has determined that serious health and welfare consequences could occur. If the concentrations are below the NAAQS, there are no expected adverse effects to humans and the environment.

4.1.1.2 Climate

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts to GHG levels within the PPA because there would be no additional surface disturbance, traffic, or release of hydrocarbons from the PPA into the atmosphere. If the Proposed Action is not approved, there would be no usc of a drill rig, compressors, separators, or dehydrators and therefore no impact to climate change.

Alternatives B and C

The assessment of GHG emissions and climate change is in its formative phase. It is currently not possible to know with certainty the net impacts from either action alternative on climate. The inconsistency in results of scientific models used to predict climate change at the global scale, coupled with the lack of scientific models designed to predict climate change on regional or local scales, limits the ability to quantify potential future impacts of decisions made at this level. When further information on the impacts to climate change is known, such information would be incorporated into the BLM's planning and NEPA documents as appropriate.

4.1.2 Potential Mitigation

The FFO participated in the Four Comers Air Quality Task Force (FCAQTF) since its inception in 2002, when it was known as the Four Comers Ozone Task Force. Because of the unanswered questions raised by these modeling efforts, the FCAQTF has continued to look at air quality issues in the Four Comers region. The FCAQTF is composed of a broad base of representatives that includes federal, state, tribal, and local governments, as well as industry, interest groups, and concerned community members. The FCAQTF has several working groups that, in 2007, worked on the development of the FCAQTF Report on Mitigation Options to serve as a resource and guide to the regulatory agencies. The responsible agencies may use the report as the basis for developing air quality management plans for the region. This may include developing new and revising existing regulations, supporting new legislation, developing new outreach and information programs, and developing and/or expanding voluntary programs for emission reductions.

Additional air quality modeling conducted since completion of the 2003 FEIS/RMP and prov1s1ons in the ROD for the FEIS/RMP provide for applications of additional emission controls if requested by the NMAQB. Based on this modeling, the NMAQB issued an interim directive that all newly issued APDs limit compressor emissions to no more than 2 g per horsepower hour of nitrous oxide (N_2O) for engines with 300 horsepower or less. The FFO has complied with this directive through a COA that has been in effect since August 1, 2005. To date, NMAQB has made no other such requests.

Currently, development of federal minerals in New Mexico's San Juan Basin is at a lower level than was forecast in the RFD scenario prepared 2001 for the PRMP/FEIS. The impacts forecast by the RFD are still valid. At the time at which the 2003 EIS/RMP was written, O3 readings did not represent a violation of the NAAQS for this pollutant. The new preliminary 8-hour O3 design value for Navajo Lake site is (2006-2008) is at 0.075 ppm, while the other two federal regulatory design-value monitors in San Juan County are Substation (2006--2008), at 0.065 ppm, and

Bloomfield (2006–2008), at 0.071 ppm. A monitor design value must be greater than the revised 8-hour O_3 standard of 0.075 ppm for a nonattainment designation.

The EPA's inventory data describes Natural Gas Systems and Petroleum Systems as the two major categories of total U.S. sources of GHG gas emissions (EPA 2008b). The inventory identifies the contributions of natural gas and petroleum systems to total carbon dioxide (CO_2) and methane (CH_4) emissions (natural gas and petroleum systems do not produce noteworthy amounts of any of the other GHGs). Within the larger category ofNatural Gas Systems, the EPA identifies emissions occuning during distinct stages of operation, including field production, processing, transmission and storage, and distribution. Petroleum Systems subactivities include production field operations, crude oil transportation, and crude oil refining. Within the two categories, the BLM has authority to regulate only those field production operations that are related to oil and gas measurement, and prevention of waste (via leaks, spills, and unauthorized flaring and venting).

The BLM's regulatory jurisdiction over field production operations has resulted in the development of best management practices (BMPs) designed to reduce impacts to air quality by reducing all emissions from field production and operations. Typical measures may include the following: flaring hydrocarbon and gases at high temperatures in order to reduce emissions of incomplete combustion; requiring that vapor recovery systems be maintained and functional in areas where petroleum liquids are stored; compressor engines with 300 horsepower or less must have NO_x emissions limited to 2 g per horsepower hour; revegetating areas of the pad that are not required for production facilities in order to reduce the amount of dust from the pads; and watering dirt roads during periods of high use in order to reduce fugitive dust emission. The significant threshold for particulate matter of 35 $\mu g/m^3$ daily $PM_{2.5}$ NAAQS is not expected to be exceeded under the proposed action alternative.

The EPA data show that improved practices and technology and changing economics have reduced emissions from oil and gas exploration and development (EPA 2008b). One of the factors in this improvement is the adoption by industry of the BMPs proposed by the EPA's Natural Gas Energy Star program. The FFO will work with industry and NMAQB to help facilitate the use of the relevant BMPs for operations proposed on federal mineral leases where such mitigation is consistent with agency policy.

4.2 Cultural Resources

4.2.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts to cultural resources in the PPA because there would be no additional surface disturbance or increase in vehicle and construction activities as a result of the Proposed Action.

Alternatives B and C

Under Alternative B and C, there would be approximately 3.42 or 3.52 acres, respectively, of surface disturbance. Surface activity would have no direct impacts to any significant cultural resource sites. Indirect impacts to the viewshed and auditory area would be limited to the four- to eight-week duration of actual construction; indirect impacts would be temporary and localized.

A beneficial impact to cultural resources from the proposed project is the added information and knowledge provided by the site-specific survey and inventory. After thorough review the BLM has determined that the Proposed Action would have no significant impact to any cultural resources.

Based on a review of the archaeological reports and the assessment of the undertaking in the PPA, BLM cultural resources staff has determined that the Proposed Action would have no effect on cultural resources (BLM 2011). This determination will be included with the BLM FFO cultural resources stipulations attached to the APD.

4.2.2 Potential Mitigation

Project mitigation measures are designed as part of the Proposed Action in order to avoid adverse impacts to protected resources, including cultural resources. In some cases this may include COAs such as protective fencing or site monitoring during construction. For the SJ 30-6 Unit 15C project, no additional mitigation measures have been recommended. As part of standard operating procedures, if additional cultural resources are discovered during construction, all work in the immediate vicinity would stop and the BLM FFO archaeologist would be notified immediately.

4.3 Invasive, Non-native Species

4.3.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts to vegetation in the PPA from invasive and non-native species because there would be no additional surface disturbance or increase in vehicle and construction activities as a result ofthe Proposed Action or Alternative C.

Alternatives B and C

Impacts to vegetation from invasive and non-native species would be similar in nature, scope, and intensity, regardless of which alternative is chosen. Under Alternative B, approximately 3.42 acres of vegetation would be disturbed by the completion of the Proposed Action; under Alternative C, approximately 3.52 acres would be disturbed. Where soils are disturbed and native vegetation is lost, there is an increased likelihood for non-native or invasive species to be introduced and become established. If non-native or invasive plant species are allowed to become established, direct impacts to vegetation from weed infestations in the PPA could be high; these could include reduced structural and species diversity, loss of wildlife habitat, and loss of rangeland productivity. Indirect impacts that result from weed infestations in the PPA could also be high; these could include changes in the fire cycle and increased economic costs from weed management efforts. Under either action alternative, strict mitigation controls (see 4.3.2) would be required.

One regulated noxious weed species was observed in the PPA for both Alternatives B and C (see Section 3.2.3). Implementation of the mitigation measure recommended below would reduce the potential for non-native and invasive species to affect the PPA for either alternative in both the short and long term.

4.3.2 Potential Mitigation

For actions such as the Proposed Action that involve surface disturbance, the BLM FFO requires reasonable steps to prevent the spread of noxious weeds. A BLM-approved weed management program may be required in the COAs of the APD. In accordance with the New Mexico Noxious Weed List Memorandum (NMDA 1999), the operator would be responsible for pretreating the PPA to control the spread of noxious weeds. Also, the operator would be responsible for weed control for the life of the proposed well and would be required to use weed seed-free hay, mulch, and straw in erosion control (personal communication, Stan Dykes 2008). No other mitigation has been recommended, other than that included in the Proposed Action, which states that all disturbed areas not needed for production equipment and vehicular access would be revegetated using a BLM FFO-approved seed mixture.

4.4 Livestock Grazing

4.4.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts to livestock grazing in the PPA because there would be no new disturbance to rangeland as a result of well construction, and there would be no increase in activity in the area when livestock might be present.

Alternatives B and C

As discussed in Section 3.2.4, the PPA is located on Grazing Allotment Number 5089, which allows for 216 federal AUMs on 5,360 acres. Under Alternative B, 3.42 acres would be disturbed (0.6% of potential rangeland, or 0.14 AUMs); under Alternative C, 3.52 acres would be disturbed (0.6% of potential rangeland, or 0.14 AUMs). In the long term, upon successful revegetation, impacts to AUMs would be negligible. These potential impacts are considered low in both the short and long term, and no mitigation is recommended.

4.4.2 Potential Mitigation

None required.

4.5 Migratory Birds

4.5.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A

Existing pinon-juniper habitat required by migratory birds would not be affected by the No Action Alternative because there would be no increased equipment and vehicle use during construction and no use of a drill rig or compressor during production; therefore, no short- or long-term increase in ambient noise levels within the PPA would occur. There would be no additional disturbance to potential foraging and nesting habitat for migratory birds, as the proposed disturbance would not occur. Accordingly, there would be no short- or long-term effects to migratory birds under the No Action Alternative.

Alternatives B and C

Impacts to migratory birds would be similar in nature, scope, and intensity, regardless of which action alternative is chosen. Adult migratory birds would not be directly harmed by either

alternative because of their mobility and ability to avoid areas of human activity. Some direct mortality could result if birds were to become trapped in open reserve pits or pipe vents. Any nests within the area of the PPA may be directly impacted, along with eggs and juveniles, during construction and removal of vegetation. The primary vegetation that would be impacted by the construction of the Proposed Action or Alternative C would be pinon pine, one-seed juniper, big sagebrush, graminoids, and forbs. Either action alternative would have low impact on these species at the population level

The increased human presence during construction, drilling, and reclamation actiVIties may indirectly disturb or displace adults from nests and foraging habitats for a short period within and surrounding the PPA, possibly three months or less, as a result of increased noise levels and dust from construction. Long-term production operations would result in only a slight increase in human activity in the immediate PPA. Effects on the population status of migratory birds are not anticipated because of the mobility of individuals and the abundance of adjacent pinon-juniper habitat used by many migratory bird species. In consideration of these factors, there would be minimal short-tenn effects and minimal long-term effects on migratory birds as a result of the either action alternative (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Anticipated Impact to Priority Migratory Bird Species

Species	Habitat Type	Potential Effects	Impact Rating-Low/Moderate/High
Burrowing owl *(Athene cunicularia)*	Sage/grass	No conflict anticipated	*nfa*
Gray flycatcher *(Empidonax wrightit)*	Pinon-juniper	Some reduction of potential nesting habitat	Low
Ash-throated flycatcher *(Myiarchus cinerascens)*	Sage/grass	Little conflict anticipated	Low
Cassin's kingbird *(Tyrannus vociferans)*	Pinon-juniper	Some reduction of potential nesting habitat	Low
Loggerhead shrike *(Lanius ludovicianus)*	Sage/grass	Little conflict anticipated	Low
Gray vireo *(Vireo vicinion*	Pinon-juniper	Little conflict anticipated	Low
Pinyon jay *(Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus)*	Pinon-juniper	Some reduction of potential nesting habitat	Low
Juniper titmouse *(Baeolophus ridgwayt)*	Pinon-juniper	Little conflict anticipated	Low
Sage thrasher *(Oreoscoptes montanus)*	Sage/grass	Little conflict anticipated	Low
Bendire's thrasher *(Toxostoma bendiret)*	Sage/grass	Some reduction of potential nesting habitat	Low
Black-throated gray warbler *(Dendroica nigrescens)*	Pinon-juniper	No conflict anticipated	*nfa*
Black-throated sparrow *(Amphispiza bilineata)*	Sage/grass	Little conflict anticipated	Low
Sage sparrow *(Amphispiza be/It)*	Sage/grass	Some reduction of potential nesting habitat	Low

4.5.2 Potential Mitigation

Project mitigation measures arc designed to mmtmtze effects on migratory birds and other wildlife. These measures include netting any permanently open pits and placing vent caps on all open pipes to prevent bird entry and nesting.

4.6 Mineral Resources

4.6.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A
Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts to mineral resources within the PPA because no natural gas would be extracted during production of the proposed well.

Alternatives B and C
Impacts to mineral resources would be similar in nature, scope, and intensity, regardless of which alternative is chosen. The project proposes to extract natural gas from the Blanco Mesaverde/Basin Dakota formations. This would result in a direct, long-term impact as a result of the irretrievable commitment of non-renewable resources. Production of energy would have a direct, beneficial impact to the nation's need for energy development. Production of energy would have no impact to locatable or salable minerals, including gold, uranium, sand, and gravel, as sources for these resources are not located within the PPA.

4.6.2 Potential Mitigation

All downhole mitigation is ensured by the BLM's review of the proposed casing and cementing program as required by 43 CFR 3160 and Onshore Oil and Gas Order No.2, Drilling Operations: B. Casing and Cementing Requirements.

4.7 Native American Religious Concerns

4.7.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A
Under the No Action Alternative there would be no additional impacts to Native American religious concerns because if the project is not approved, no TCPs would be affected.

Alternatives B and C
Alternatives B or C are not known to physically threaten any TCPs, prevent access to sacred sites, prevent the possession of sacred objects, or interfere or otherwise hinder the performance of traditional ceremonies and rituals. The PPA and surrounding area has been intensively surveyed and no resomces under the purview ofNAGPRA are known to occur.

4.7.2 Potential Mitigation

No site-specific mitigation measures have been recommended for the Proposed Action or Alternative C.

4.8 Noise

4.8.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A

The No Action Alternative would maintain ambient noise levels, and no additional noise impacts within the PPA would be anticipated because there would be no use of a drill rig or compressor during the drilling and production phase of the Proposed Action or Alternative C. There would be no increased equipment and vehicle use during construction and therefore no short-term increase in noise.

Alternatives B and C

An increase in the ambient noise level would occur during the drilling and construction phase for either action alternative. However, the impact to the background noise level would be moderate and short term and would be loudest near the drilling equipment, which has prohibited access to the general public. Oil and gas workers wear ear protection to minimize noise impacts. Most noise impacts would terminate or decrease substantially after the well is drilled and completed (approximately 4-8 weeks).

A compressor may be required during the operation phase, which would add to the existing noise in the area. If a compressor is required during the operation phase, it could contribute to the long-term (20-30 years) noise levels in the area; however, a muffler could be used, which would mitigate the impact to a low level. Noise levels decrease to 30 to 40 dB for typical producing wells in the area (SWCA 2009).

Indirect impacts to recreationists and wildlife as a result of increased noise could last for 20 to 30 years. Because the area is not a destination for recreationists and is managed as an Extensive Recreation Management Area, the impact would generally not affect many visitors. Wildlife could be initially impacted and move away from the area but could eventually habituate to the noise levels associated with production.

4.8.2 Potential Mitigation

No other mitigation has been recommended other than that included in the Proposed Action, which states that a compressor may also be required to pressurize gas for delivery to the transportation pipeline. If required, the compressor would conform to BLM FFO Noise NTL standards, which could require a muffler to reduce noise to within BLM standards.

4.9 Paleontological Resources

4.9.1 Direct and Indirect Effects

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts to paleontological resources within the PPA. If the project is not approved, soil would not be excavated, ground disturbance would not occur, and subsurface fossil remains would not be disturbed because the pad location would not be constructed and graded.

Alternatives B and C

Potential impacts to paleontological resources would be similar in scope, nature, and intensity, regardless of which alternative is chosen.

The PPA and surrounding area were assessed through the RMP and are individually evaluated based on the BLM's PFYC system, known paleontological locality information, experience with numerous similar oil and gas projects in the surrounding area, and existing reports and data for the surrounding area. The PPA is not within a ELM-identified SDA for paleontological resources, and the likelihood of any significant paleontology in this area is very low. However, paleontological resources may be present within the PPA, and impacts to paleontological resources could occur. The relatively small size of the proposed disturbance would make any such potential impacts low.

Surface disturbance within the PPA could have direct adverse impacts to paleontological resources as the result of breakage and crushing of fossil remains. Direct impacts to fossil localities could result from the disturbance of the stratigraphic context in which they are located. The Proposed Action could also create indirect impacts to areas by changing erosion patterns. An increase in human activity in the area could augment the possibility of unauthorized removal or other alterations to paleontological resources in the area. Potential impacts to paleontological resources as a result of the Proposed Action or Alternative C would be low and long term.

4.9.2 Potential Mitigation

No site-specific mitigation has been identified because the PPA is not within a BLM FFO-designated SDA for paleontological resources. All necessary BLM FFO paleontological resources stipulations would be followed as indicated in the COAs, attached to the APD. These stipulations could include, but are not limited to, temporary or permanent fencing or other physical barriers, monitoring of earth-disturbing construction, project area reduction and/or specific construction avoidance zones, and employee education. Based on the BLM's on-site visits and other factors discussed above, a determination for final project clearance and stipulations shall be issued by the BLM.

If previously undocumented paleontological sites are encountered during construction, all activities would stop in the vicinity of the discovery and the BLM would be immediately notified. The site would then be evaluated. Mitigation measures, such as data recovery, may be required by the BLM to prevent impacts to newly identified paleontological resources.

4.10 Public Health and Safety

4.10.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional public health and safety hazards within the PPA related to construction, drilling, or production of the proposed well. If the Proposed Action is not approved, there would be no increase in vehicle access during construction, large trucks would not be accessing the area, and waste fluids produced as a result of drilling *would* not be produced. Construction of a reserve pit would not be necessary.

Alternatives B and C

Each action alternative proposes the construction and operation of one natural gas well, access road, and pipeline tie, which present potential public health and safety hazards. The PPA is approximately 14 miles from Blanco, and no residential dwellings are located in the immediate vicinity. Safety measures, including ensuring adequate dimensions and lining of the reserve pit, constructing protective fencing, restricting access, and posting signs, help minimize public health and safety concerns.

The construction, drilling, and operation of the proposed well would meet all federal, state, and local health and safety requirements for waste handling and disposal. Drilling operations on federal and tribal oil and gas leases would be conducted in accordance to the BLM's Onshore Oil and Gas Order No. 2 (BLM 1988). Disposal of produced water would be handled pursuant to the BLM's Onshore Oil and Gas Order No. 7 (BLM 1993). In addition, the proposed well would be routinely monitored by Burlington for safety until the well has been plugged and officially abandoned.

4.10.1.1 Hazardous and Solid Waste Materials

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts from hazardous wastes within the PPA related to construction, drilling, or production of the proposed well. If the Proposed Action is not approved, there would be no increase in construction activities with the potential to disturb existing pipelines, no increase in produced hydrocarbons, and no fluids produced as a result of drilling; therefore, no reserve pit would be necessary.

Alternatives B and C

Impacts associated with either action alternative would be short term and minor, as the built-in mitigation would handle waste in an approved manner. Sewage would be contained within chemical toilets, and none would be released. Trash would be contained during construction in maintained trash bins that are emptied as necessary. All produced hydrocarbons would be put in tanks or in a lined reserve pit on location during drilling and completion work. If the well becomes productive, any produced water would be placed in on-site tanks or pumped to an approved disposal well. In the event of a spill or release, the proper reporting and cleanup procedures would be followed. All waste would be disposed of in the proper manner as required by federal and state Jaw and as described in the COAs.

When significant amounts of chemicals are stored on-site, governmental agencies would be notified as required under the Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act of 1986. The notification of releases such as natural gas, natural gas liquids, and petroleum, outside the facility site is required under CERCLA and under Notice to Lessees and Operators of Onshore Federal and Indian Oil and Gas Leases (NTL-3A). The well location must have an informational sign, as directed under 43 CFR 3160.

4.10.2 Potential Mitigation

No additional mitigation has been recommended beyond that already incorporated m the Proposed Action and discussed above.

4.11 Recreation

4.11.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts to recreation resources within the PPA. If the well is not approved, there would be no increase in vehicle and human activity and no noise impacts associated with the construction and production phases.

Alternatives B and C

Impacts to recreation as a result of implementation of either action alternative would be similar in scope, nature, and intensity. The PPA is located within the Navajo Lake Horse Trail SDA, managed for equestrian recreational use on designated trails, routes, and areas. The entire SDA consists of 6,752 acres, with 5,657 acres managed by the BLM and 5,951 acres containing federal minerals. Oil and gas leasing and development are managed under Controlled Surface Use constraints. Management prescriptions specified in the RMP (BLM 2003b:C-118) that apply to the Proposed Action are as follows:

> Controlled Surface Use constraints for new and existing oil and gas leases prescribe no new activity allowed for a distance of 150 feet from either side of the designated trail system. Exceptions granted by recreation staff on a case-by-case basis as determined by environmental review.
>
> No construction, drilling, completion, plugging, or work-over activities are allowed when they would interfere with authorized recreation events and from November 1 through March 31 for bald eagle protection.
>
> The PPA is managed as VRM Class III.

The designated Navajo Lake Horse Trail is approximately 0.5 mile to the north of the PPA. The PPA is in an established oil and gas area, and recreationists are restricted from active construction sites within the area. Trail users would be restricted from the PPA during construction (4-8 weeks) by signs, and if necessary, from on-site equipment during production by protective fencing. No construction or well activity would be allowed during the authorized Mother's Day weekend Navajo Lake Horse Trail ride.

4.11.2 Potential Mitigation

None required.

4.12 Socioeconomics

4.12.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional beneficial impacts to socioeconomics associated with an increased number of economic multipliers in the region surrounding the PPA.

Alternatives B and C

Impacts to socioeconomics as a result of implementation of either action alternative would be similar in intensity, nature, and scope. Additionally, this analysis does not focus on all aspects of economics within the PPA, but considers only the projected economic effects of Alternatives B and C and economic statistics at the state, county, and local levels to describe the economic context of the project.

It is expected that approval of either alternative would bring some economic multipliers to the towns en route to the PPA. Construction crews would likely patronize local businesses for supplies such as fuel, food, and refreshments. The PPA provides socioeconomic benefits in the form of the production of natural gas used for heating and other energy needs in the greater southwestern United States. Therefore, approval of the Proposed Action would result in low beneficial impacts in the short (4–8 weeks) and long term, as the well would be visited once a week (or more often as necessary) for maintenance. Workers could stop in the local town for incidentals. These economic benefit multipliers would be low.

4.12.2 Potential Mitigation

None required.

4.13 Soils

4.13.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts to soils within the PPA. If the project is not approved, no additional vegetation would be cleared, soil would not be excavated, topsoil would not be stockpiled, culverts would not be installed, and silt fencing would not be necessary because the pad location would not be constructed and graded.

Alternatives B and C

Under both Alternatives B and C, well pad construction and drilling would have a direct impact to soils through physical disturbances. This would be limited to those areas where vegetation is removed or destroyed. The impacts would be of three types: the physical removal, mixing, or burying of surface soils; the damage or destruction of soil properties in place; and the mixing of drilling and production wastes into the soil. During construction of the proposed well pad, approximately 3.42 acres of soil would be disturbed under Alternative B, and approximately 3.52 acres of soil would be disturbed under Alternative C. Vegetation would be cleared from the pad location, and surface soils would be removed to a maximum depth of 6 inches and stockpiled for later use during reclamation. The pad location would then be graded and the soil compacted. Surface runoff from existing roads is not anticipated to deviate from current conditions.

Construction of the proposed well pad would indirectly cause an undetermined amount of water erosion, with the loss of surface soils, which would reduce viability for plant regeneration. Impacts from the sedimentation, runoff, and erosion are expected to be relatively low for the life of the project. After productive service and during abandonment procedures, the well would be reclaimed by removing surface equipment, the well bores plugged per industry standards, the well pad site recontoured to preconstruction conditions, and topsoil distributed to emulate

preconstruction conditions. Following reclamation earthwork, the site would be seeded with a BLM-approved seed mixture.

4.13.2 Potential Mitigation

No other mitigation has been recommended other than that included in the Proposed Action, which states that drainage from the well pad area would be controlled, as detailed in the well pad diagram (see Appendix B), to minimize off-site migration of disturbed soils. Additional soil erosion measures and BLM-approved BMPs may be required as pa1i of the COAs in the APD.

4.14 Special Management Species

4.14.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts to special management species in the PPA. If the proposed well is not approved there would be no additional disturbance to potential foraging and nesting habitat for special management species. Direct impacts to special management species related to the increased vehicle access during construction would not occur.

Alternatives B and C

Potential impacts to special management species would be similar in scope, nature, and intensity, if either action alternative is chosen. Five special management species has the potential to occur in the PPA and surrounding area. Areas within and/or surrounding the PPA provide potential foraging and nesting habitat for golden eagle and prairie falcon and potential foraging habitat for bald eagle, American peregrine falcon, and ferruginous hawk. Raptor nest data from the BLM FFO show nests are present near the PPA; however, no nests or signs of nests (e.g., whitewash) were observed within or in the vicinity of the PPA during field reconnaissance.

Disturbance associated with Alternative B would be approximately 3.42 acres and approximately 3.52 acres associated with Alternative C, which represents a small portion of potential habitat for the five special management species listed above. Although the area contains potential habitat for these species, the site-specific surveys conducted by an SWCA biologist did not find any nests or observe any of these species in the PPA. These five species show no special affinity for the PPA, and impacts are anticipated to be low.

4.14.2 Potential Mitigation

No other mitigation has been recommended other than that included in the Proposed Action, which states that BLM-approved BMPs may be required as part of the COAs in the APD.

4.15 Vegetation

4.15.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts to vegetation within the PPA because no additional surface disturbance would occur related to the Proposed Action. In the long term, new vegetation from the BLM-approved seed mix would not be introduced, and the vegetation community would continue to progress naturally.

Alternatives B and C

Approximately 3.42 or 3.52 acres, respectively, of pinon-juniper/sagebrush habitat would be disturbed and/or removed in conjunction with the completion of Alternatives B or C. The direct impacts of vegetation removal include short-term loss of vegetation, with the modification of vegetation structure, plant species composition, and areal extent of cover types. Impacts from increased soil exposure, loss of wildlife habitat, reduced plant diversity, and loss of livestock forage are expected to be low because of the small amount of disturbance relative to the surrounding landscape. Indirect impacts include the increased potential for non-native and noxious plant establishment and introduction, accelerated wind and water erosion, changes in water runoff as a result of road/facility construction, soil impacts that affect plant growth (soil erosion or siltation), shifts in species composition, changes in vegetative density away from desirable conditions, and changes in visual aesthetics.

Stripped topsoil and vegetation (seed source) would be temporarily stockpiled for future reclamation. Interim reclamation activities are required at producing well sites. Complete reclamation would occur after the well is no longer economically productive. The well pad would be recontoured and seeded upon being plugged and abandoned. The impacts to vegetation would be moderate and short term during drilling. When the well pad is reclaimed and seeded, long-term impacts would be low.

4.15.2 Potential Mitigation

No other mitigation has been recommended other than that included in the Proposed Action, which states that following construction of the proposed well, all disturbed areas not needed for production would be revegetated using a BLM-approved seed mixture. The remaining long-term disturbance would be reclaimed according to the COAs.

4.16 Visual Resources

4.16.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts to visual resources within the PPA because there would be no additional surface disturbance, and no aboveground production facilities would be constructed. There would be no short-term impacts to visual resources resulting from the dust plumes of vehicles accessing the PPA.

Alternatives B and C

Under Alternative B, construction of the well pad would add a low, direct, and short-term visual impact through the disturbance of 3.42 acres of natural vegetation. Under Alternative C, construction of the well pad would add a low, direct, and short-term visual impact through the disturbance of 3.52 acres of natural vegetation.

If a well becomes a producer, facilities—including the wellhead, dehydrator, tank, and the meter run-would remain on-site, adding a low visual impact in the immediate foreground of the existing well pad. However, under both alternatives, all aboveground production facilities would be low profile and painted juniper green to blend in with the surrounding environment. Construction activities would result in moderate, short-term impacts to visual resources, including the clearing of 3.42 or 3.52 acres of vegetation, light pollution from the drill rigs, dust,

increased traffic, and the presence of drilling equipment. After construction and completion, well production equipment (e.g., dehydrator) would remain on-site, resulting in a negligible long-term visual impact. Therefore, Alternatives B and C meet VRM Class III management objectives, which allow for a high level of modification to the existing landscape.

4.16.2 Potential Mitigation

None required.

4.17 Water Quality- Surface and Ground

4.17.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts to water quality within the PPA because if the project is not approved, the pad location would not be constructed and graded. The soil would therefore not be excavated, topsoil would not be stockpiled, culverts would not be installed, and diversion ditches would not be necessary. There would be no additional mobilization or dispersal of sediments as a result of excavation work.

Alternatives B and C

It is not anticipated that approval of Alternatives B and C would result in negative changes to water quality, regardless of which alternative is approved. Impacts to water quality are expected to be low because both alternatives include mitigation measures to reduce the potential for impacts from sedimentation, runoff, and erosion, such as stockpiling the top 6 inches of topsoil on-site for redistribution during well pad reclamation, installing culverts for proper drainage, installing silt fences, and constructing a diversion ditch. Additionally, lining the reserve pits with a 20-mil impervious material would prevent seepage into surface or shallow groundwater.

Removal of vegetation and soil disturbance for either Alternative B or C may result in an increase in sedimentation, runoff, and erosion. These impacts are expected to be relatively low for the life of the project. The use of BMPs and pollution prevention measures, as required by federal and state regulations, would help minimize impacts to water quality. The increase in the amount of sedimentation would depend on wind and water events in relation to surface disturbance, the timing and success of reclamation, and erosion control measures.

4.17.2 Potential Mitigation

BLM-approved BMPs and pollution prevention measures may be required as part of the COAs in the approved APD.

4.18 Wildlife

4.18.1 Direct and Indirect Impacts

Alternative A

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no additional impacts to wildlife in the project area because there would be no alterations to habitat as a result of surface disturbance associated with construction of the proposed well. If the project is not approved, direct impacts to wildlife related to the increased vehicle access during construction would not occur.

Alternatives B and C

Under Alternative B, 3.42 acres of new ground disturbance would occur. Under Alternative C, 3.52 acres of new/reclaimed ground disturbance would occur. Once construction of the well is completed, the area not needed for operations and maintenance would be revegetated using a BLM FFO-approved seed mixture. Upon final abandonment of the wells, the remaining disturbance would be reclaimed as outlined in the COAs.

Impacts to wildlife would include habitat change, habitat fragmentation, and habitat disturbance. The PPA does not include specialized habitat or habitat of limited availability. Species that have limited mobility may be adversely impacted by the construction of the well pad, drilling, and production activities. The majority of wildlife species in the area would be likely to move into available habitat surrounding the PPA.

Direct habitat loss from surface disturbance during construction is expected to be about 3.42 or 3.52 acres, respectively. While the area is being reclaimed, there would be an ongoing negative impact. Once the area outside the teardrop is reclaimed, the impacts would continue for the life of the well (less than 20-30 years). After the well is abandoned and reclaimed, the revegetation would provide a beneficial impact, as the ELM-approved seed mixture adds grasses and forbs and helps introduce a mosaic of plants in the greater area. Impacts associated with loss of habitat would be reduced to low upon completion of construction. Indirect impacts include a reduction in habitat quality as a result of increased noise levels and increased human activity.

4.18.2 Potential Mitigation

No other mitigation has been recommended other than that included in the Proposed Action.

4.19 Cumulative Impacts

This EA addresses the resources and impacts on a site-specific basis as required by NEPA. Pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28 and 1502.21, this site-specific EA tiers to the information and analysis contained in the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2003b). In particular, the cumulative impact analysis contained in the PRMP/FEIS, coupled with the level of development proposed by the RFD for oil and gas, accounts for the broader impacts of oil and gas development. The past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future environmental disturbances within this overall project area are oil and gas development, grazing, hunting, and OHV use.

The PPA and surrounding vicinity have been industrialized with oil and gas well development. The surface disturbance for each project has contributed to a fragmented land use pattern. Cumulative impacts fluctuate with the gradual reclamation of old wells and the creation of new access roads and well pads. The ongoing process of restoration and creating new disturbances continues as minerals are extracted from the land. Reducing disturbed areas and applying appropriate mitigation measures would minimize cumulative impacts.

Analysis of cumulative impacts for the RFD of 9,942 new oil and gas wells on public lands in the San Juan Basin was presented in the PRMP/FEIS (BLM 2003b). This total reflects 28 wells that would be inaccessible as a result of no surface occupancy constraints; these were subtracted from the total of 9,970 that was presented in the RFD. The total also reflects the anticipated commingling of future wells (BLM 2003b). The proposed well is included in the total analyzed. Total surface disturbance projected by the plan was 18,577 acres, with 805 miles of new roads. Alternatives Band C would account for 3.42 and 3.52 acres of total surface disturbance (0.01%),

respectively, within the San Juan Basin as analyzed in the PRMP/FEIS. Therefore, the either action alternative's contribution to the cumulative impact of oil and gas development is minimal.

4.19.1 Air Resources

The leased area of the Proposed Action has been industrialized with oil and gas well development. The surface disturbance for each project that has been permitted has created a spreading out of land use fragmentation. The cumulative impacts fluctuate with the gradual reclamation of well abandonments and the creation of new additional surface disturbances in the construction of new access roads and well pads. The ongoing process of restoration of abandonments and creating new disturbances for drilling new wells gradually accumulates as the minerals are extracted from the land. Preserving as much land as possible and applying appropriate mitigation measures would alleviate the cumulative impacts.

Due to the absence of regulatory requirements to measure GHG emissions and the variability of oil and gas activities on federal minerals, it is not possible to accurately quantify potential GHG emissions in the affected areas as a result of approving this APD. A general assumption, however, can be made: drilling this well may contribute to GHG emissions.

The lack of scientific tools designed to predict climate change on regional or local scales limits the ability to quantify potential future impacts. However, potential impacts to natural resources and plant and animal species due to climate change are likely to be varied, including those in the southwestern United States. For example, if global climate change results in a warmer and drier climate, increased particulate matter impacts could occur due to increased windblown dust from drier and less stable soils. Cool season plant species' spatial ranges are predicted to move north and to higher elevations, and extinction of endemic threatened/endangered plants may be accelerated.

Due to loss of habitat or competition from other species whose ranges may shift northward, the population of some animal species may be reduced or increased. Less snow at lower elevations would likely impact the timing and quantity of snowmelt, which, in turn, could impact water resources and species dependant on historic water conditions. Forests at higher elevations in New Mexico, for example, have been exposed to warmer and drier conditions over a 10-year period. Should the trend continue, the habitats and identified drought sensitive species in these forested areas and higher elevations may also be more affected by climate change.

4.19.2 .Wildlife

Oil and gas development throughout the San Juan Basin has the potential to affect wildlife through alterations in habitat. Wildlife habitat alteration includes modification of the vegetation type on the disturbed areas and, on a larger scale, habitat fragmentation for some species, along with noise and visual intrusion into the area during various phases of the project. Oil and gas development includes adverse direct and indirect impacts to wildlife associated with ground disturbances caused by constructing road networks, drilling, and installing well pads, pipelines, and other associated infrastructure. There are also impacts from ongoing maintenance for approximately 20 to 30 years.

In the short tenn, through construction and production, cumulative impacts are largely associated with the overall habitat fragmentation from well pads and other developments. In the long term, after abandonment and reclamation, the mosaic of plant types could be a beneficial impact, providing a more diverse plant community.

Chapter 5– Consultation and Coordination

SWCA has prepared this EA to comply with the requirements and guidelines prescribed by the BLM FFO. Selected portions of this document were specifically written by the BLM FFO. The following agencies, organizations, and individuals contributed to the preparation of this document.

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John Kendall	BLM FFO	
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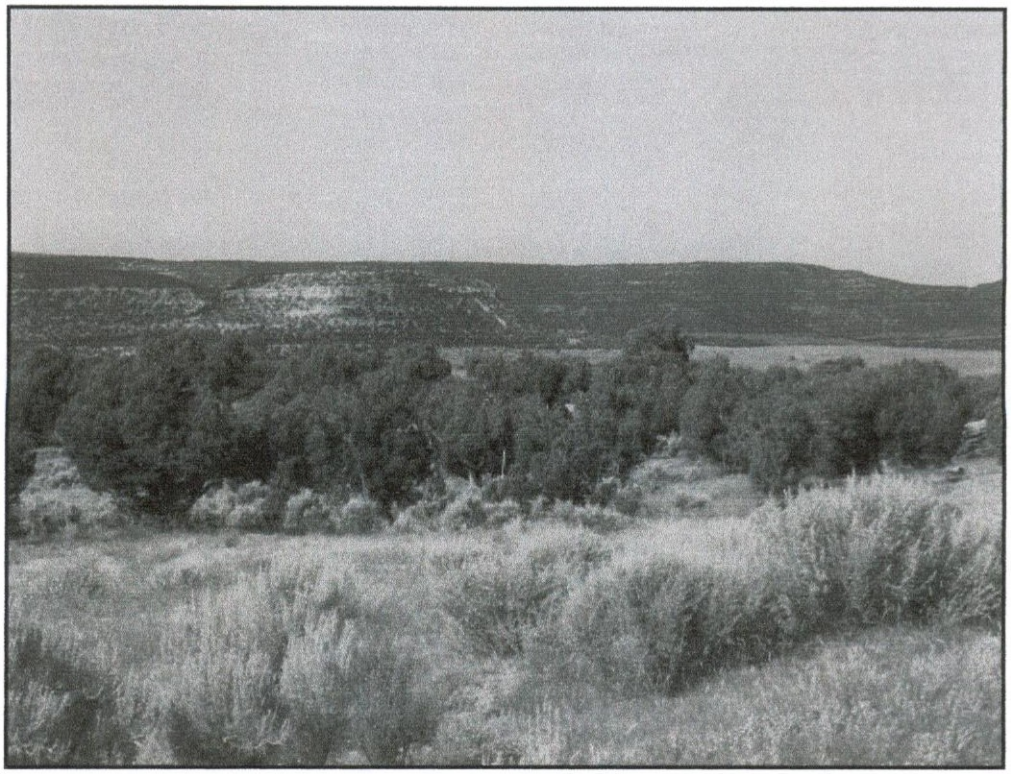
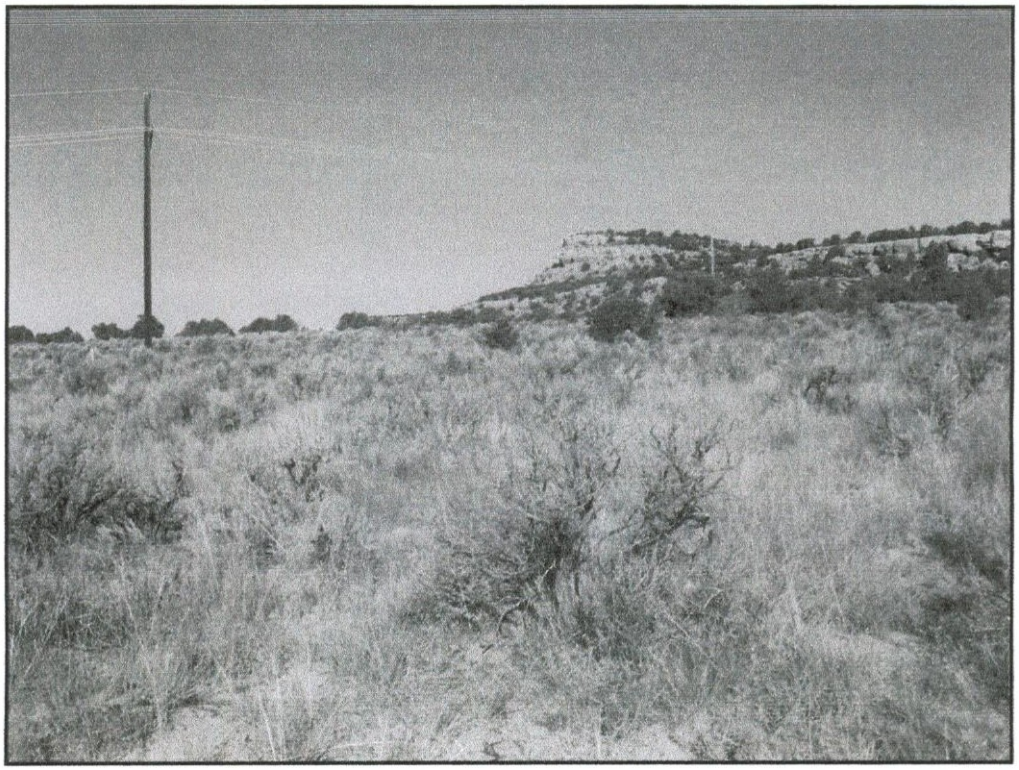
Appendix A – Photographs of the Proposed Project Area



Photograph A1. View of staked location for Alternative B, facing south.



Photograph A2. View of the proposed well pad for Alternative C, facing west.

Appendix B – Plats, Maps, and Driving Directions for Alternatives B and C

Appendix C – Selected Laws and Regulations Governing Federal Oil and Gas Development

Table Cl. Selected Laws and Regulations Governing Federal Oil and Gas Development

Law/Regulation	Resource Consideration	Authority
American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978	Native American religious concerns	All agencies
Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940, as amended	Bald and golden eagles	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Bureau of Land Management Instruction Memoranda, national and state	Sensitive species and habitat	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Clean Air Act of 1970, as amended	Air quality, air emissions	New Mexico Environment Department
Clean Water Act of 1977, as amended; Section 401	Discharges from point sources into jurisdictional waters	New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission
Clean Water Act of 1977, as amended; Section 402: Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan	Discharges from stormwater runoff into jurisdictional waters	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Clean Water Act of 1977, as amended; Section 404	Surface jurisdictional waters of the U.S.	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Colorado River Salinity Control Act of 1974, as amended	Colorado River Basin	BLM
Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act of 1980, as amended	Use and disposal of listed hazardous materials	EPA
Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended; Section 7	Threatened and endangered plant and animal species	USFWS
Executive Order 11988, as amended	Floodplains	All agencies
Executive Order 12898	Environmental and health conditions in minority and low-income communities	All agencies
Farmland Protection Policy Act of 1994	Prime and unique farmlands	Natural Resource Conservation Service
Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern; Wilderness areas	BLM
Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974, as amended: Executive Order 13112	Noxious weeds	All agencies
Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended; Executive Order 131186	Migratory birds, nests, and eggs	USFWS
Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, as amended; Associated Onshore Orders	Federal oil and gas leases and related transportation pipelines	BLM
National Environmental Policy Act of 1969	Human environment, under federal actions	All agencies
National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended; Section 106	Cultural resources	All agencies
Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990	Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony	All agencies
New Mexico Noxious Weed List	Noxious weeds in the state of New Mexico	New Mexico Department of Agriculture
Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976	Use of hazardous materials	EPA
Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, as amended	Wild and scenic rivers	All agencies