

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
AND DECISION RECORD  
EA-NM-060-02-053**

**DECISION:** It is my decision to authorize the Application For Permit To Drill Or Deepen (APD), for the Rio "22" Federal Com. #1 gas well, submitted by Dominion Oklahoma Texas Exploration & Production, Inc. The provisions for the approval of the APD will include the attachment of the Roswell Field Office requirements as defined in the following exhibits; **Exhibit A** - Location Map, **Exhibit B** - Well Drilling Requirements, **Exhibit C** - Conditions of Approval, **Exhibit D** - Permanent Resource Road Requirements, and any special mitigating measures developed in the environmental assessment.

In the event the well proves to be a dry hole, or when the well is abandoned, I recommend that reclamation requirements be attached to the well abandonment, including additional requirements imperative for the complete reclamation of the disturbed areas. These actions are subject to 43 CFR 3160 regulations for Onshore Oil and Gas operations on federal lease NM-98182.

Authority for these actions is the Mineral Leasing Act of February 25, 1920, as amended.

These actions will affect public lands described as:

New Mexico Principal Meridian

Section 22; SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ , T. 14 S., R. 30 E.  
660' FSL & 1980' FEL

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:** Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached environmental assessment, I have determined that impacts resulting from the proposed actions are not expected to be significant and an environmental impact statement is not required.

**RATIONALE FOR DECISION:** The proposed actions would not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation. Portions of the subject lands and adjacent lands have been used for similar purposes and all present and potential uses and users have been considered.

**COMPLIANCE AND MONITORING:** The construction phase of the proposed actions and subsequent operational phases will be monitored as per regulations.

//signed  
**Larry D. Bray, Assistant Field Manager,  
Lands and Minerals**

4/8/02  
**Date**

# ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA# NM-060-02-053

**WELL NAME & NO.: Rio "22" Federal Com. #1**  
**BLM Serial #:**

Section 22, T. 14 S., R. 30 E., NMPM,  
660' FSL & 1980' FEL, Unit Letter 0

Chaves County, New Mexico

**OPERATOR: Dominion Oklahoma Texas Exploration & Production, Inc.**

**ACTION:** Application for Permit to Drill

**SURFACE/MINERAL ESTATE:** Federal Minerals/Surface

## **I. Introduction**

### A. Need for the Proposed Action:

Dominion Oklahoma Texas Exploration & Production, Inc. proposes to drill and complete a natural gas well at the above described location. The proposed action is needed to develop the mineral lease. If completed as proposed, the well would be produced under a communitization agreement that would include a portion of the lease.

### B. Conformance with Land Use Plan:

Oil and gas development is in conformance with the Roswell Approved Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision, October 1997.

### C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, or other Plans:

The proposed action does not conflict with any known State or local planning, ordinance or zoning.

## **II. Proposed Action and Alternatives**

### A. Proposed Action:

Dominion Oklahoma Texas Exploration & Production, Inc. submitted an Application for Permit to Drill on 3/5, 2002, to drill the Rio "22" Federal Com. #1 gas well.

The proposed action would include:

1. The access road begins from the Cindy County Road to the proposed well pad. Of the 24,457 feet of access road, there is 1,457 feet of new access road construction, and about 22,957 feet of road would cross public lands. The road would have a driving surface (travelway) of 14 feet, with a maximum 30-foot wide surface disturbance area for the road construction. The proposed access road would be constructed and maintained in accordance with the New Mexico Road Policy. A Right-Of Way is Required. The access road was rerouted from its original route submitted with the APD.

Right-of-Way NM-105315 was filed on April 2, 2002 as rerouted. The construction of approximately 1,457 feet of new access road would begin from an existing road and would access the southeast corner of the proposed well pad. All other existing access roads would be maintained in as good or better condition than were existing at the commencement of operations.

2. The construction of the proposed well pad would be 285 feet long by 192 feet wide. The construction of the reserve pit would be about 150 feet by 125 feet and dug 4 feet below ground level. The reserve pit would be located on the east side of the well pad. Standard oilfield construction equipment consisting of; track-type tractors, motor graders, dump trucks, and water trucks would be used to construct the access road and well pad. A rotary drilling rig would be used to drill the well to a depth of 10,900 feet. Associated production facilities (e.g., pipeline, separator, storage tanks, etc.) would be installed during the production phase of this well. Topsoil would be stockpiled for future use over the disturbed areas.

3. Surfacing material (caliche/gravel) needed for the construction of the access road and well pad could be obtained by the operator from a federal pit in the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 15 - T. 14 S. - R. 30 E., Chaves County, New Mexico.

#### B. Alternatives:

##### 1. Relocate the Proposed Action:

The well location is determined on the basis of subsurface geologic information and to a certain extent, by spacing regulations imposed by the New Mexico Oil Conservation District II. No other alternative location would have significantly fewer impacts than, or have a clear advantage over, the proposed location. Therefore, the alternative of changing the location involved in this action is not analyzed further in this EA.

##### 2. No Action:

Under this alternative, the application would be rejected. None of the environmental impacts associated with the proposed action or alternate location would occur. Additionally, economic benefits of the proposed action would not be realized, and the existing environment, including the developments in place, would remain unchanged.

### **III. Description of the Affected Environment**

#### A. General Setting:

The existing access road and the proposed well pad are located on federal minerals and surface, about 54 miles SE, of Roswell, N.M.. The mean annual precipitation is 12 to 13 inches. Historical and present use of the subject lands have been limited to livestock grazing and energy development

#### B. Rights of Record:

An inspection of the Master Title Plats and other Bureau records revealed the following title information pertaining to valid existing prior rights on the subject lands:

- Oil and gas leases: NM-98182 - covers lease actions.
- No federally administered rights-of-way would be affected in the project area.
- No mining claims are recorded within Sec. 22, T. 14 S., R. 30 E., NMPM.

#### C. Affected Resources:

The following critical resources have been evaluated and are either not present or are not affected by the proposed action or the alternatives in this EA:

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC's)  
Cultural Resources (02-R-037-A & B)  
Farmlands, Prime/Unique  
Floodplains  
Native American Religious Concerns  
Threatened or Endangered Species (Plants & Animals)  
Wastes, Hazardous/Solid  
Wetlands and Riparian Zones  
Wild & Scenic Rivers  
Wilderness

1. Air Quality:

The area of the proposed action is considered a Class II air quality area. A Class II area allows a moderate amount air quality degradation. The primary sources of air pollution are dust from blowing wind on disturbed or exposed substratum soils and exhaust emissions from motorized equipment.

2. Soils:

The proposed action would occur in soils formed in aeolian and alluvial sediments on uplands. The soils are deep, well drained soils. The soil profile is noncalcareous in the upper part of the survey area and slightly calcareous in the lower part and mildly alkaline throughout. The soil is referred to as Faskin fine sand as described in the Soil Survey of Chaves County, New Mexico, Southern Part (Pages 20, 60, & 61, map #98). Permeability is moderate or moderately rapid. Runoff is slow. The hazard of water erosion is slight and the hazard of soil blowing is severe. 0 to 1 percent slopes.

3. Vegetation:

The native vegetation in the area is composed of mainly tall and mid grasses, shrubs, and forbs, such as, sand blue stem, shinnery oak, little bluestem, side-oats grama, yellow indiagrass, Halls panicum, hairy grama, plains bristlegrass, sand dropseed, mesquite, and yucca. The vegetation in the areas of the proposed action would be affected when the vegetation is cleared from the access road and well pad.

4. Invasive & Noxious Weeds:

There are no known populations of invasive or noxious weed species on the proposed access road and well pad.

Infestations of noxious weeds can have a disastrous impact on biodiversity and natural ecosystems. Noxious weeds affect native plant species by out-competing native vegetation for light, water and soil nutrients. Noxious weeds cause estimated losses to producers \$2 to \$3 billion annually. These losses are attributed to: (1) Decreased quality of agricultural products due to high levels of competition from noxious weeds; (2) decreased quantity of agricultural products due to noxious weed infestations; and (3) costs to control and/or prevent the noxious weeds.

Further, noxious weeds can negatively affect livestock and dairy producers by making forage either unpalatable or toxic to livestock, thus decreasing livestock productivity and potentially increasing producers' feed costs and animal health care costs. Increased costs to operators are eventually borne by consumers.

Noxious weeds also affect recreational uses, and reduces realty values of both the directly influenced properties and adjacent properties.

Recent federal legislation has been enacted requiring state and county agencies to implement noxious weed control programs. Monies would be made available for these activities from the federal government, generated from the federal tax base. Therefore, all citizens and tax payers of the United States are directly affected when noxious weed control prevention is not exercised.

#### 5. Ground Water Quality:

Useable water for stock has been reported in the Triassic redbeds and the Artesia Group. However, it is apparent from the depths that the water could not be obtained from the Artesia Group. Deepest useable water reported occurs at 350 ft. hence surface casing should be set at 400 ft.

#### 6. Wildlife:

Wildlife species utilizing this area for habitat include mule deer, pronghorn antelope, coyote, fox, rabbits, kangaroo rats, pocket gophers, herptile species, as well as a variety of songbirds, dove, quail, and raptors.

The gas well falls within the Prairie Chicken Wildlife Habitat Area. The well pad is on the outermost extremity of any LPC area and the proposed action would not effect any populations or habitat for the Lesser Prairie Chickens. The closest known booming ground is approximately 6 miles to the north. Recent surveys have been conducted to verify activity within the proposed project area.

The sand dune lizard will not be impacted due to the absence of sand dune blowout complexes. Some shinnery oak is present within the project area, but the dominant landscape features area mesquite hummocks interspersed around three-awns, dropseeds, yucca and shinnery oak. Therefore there are no negative impacts to the State Endangered sand dune lizard or potential habitat.

No known special status species (plant/animal) or critical habitat are present within the confines of the access road and well pad.

#### 7. Range:

The proposed well is located within the BLM grazing allotment #65075, known as the Bogle's Turkey Track. The grazing permittee is Bogle LTD. Co., P.O. Drawer 460, Dexter, NM 88230.

#### 8. Visual Resources:

\_\_\_\_\_The proposed actions are located withing a designated VRM Class IV area. The setting presents a winter gray setting and in warm months, with foliage, a gray to gray-green color pattern.

#### 9. Recreation:

The area around the proposed action site is primarily used by recreational visitors engaged in hunting, off-highway vehicle driving and caving. Other visitors include oil and gas industrial workers and ranchers.

#### 10. Cave/Karst:

\_\_\_\_\_No surface cave/karst features were observed in the immediate vicinity of the proposed actions. However, the proposed actions are located in a medium karst potential area.

11. Minority or Low-income Populations or Communities: The proposed actions would not affect the minority or low-income populations or communities.

#### IV. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

##### A. Proposed Action Impacts:

The surface disturbance involved in the construction of the well pad, and reserve pit would total about 2.6 acres of federal surface.

##### 1. Air Quality:

Air quality would temporary be impacted with pollution from exhaust emissions, chemical odors, and dust that would be caused by the motorized equipment used to construct the access road, well pad, and by the drilling rig that will be used to drill the well. Dust dissemination would discontinue upon completion of the construction phase of the access road and 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 southeastern 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.

##### 2. Soils:

The construction of the access road and well pad would physically disturb about 2.6 acres of topsoil and would expose the substratum soils. The exposed soils would be susceptible to wind blowing and water erosion. Surfacing the exposed soils on the access road and well pad would minimize these impacts. Construction of the reserve pit 4 feet below ground level would impact deeper soil horizons on the well pad. The impact to the soils would be remedied upon reclamation of the well pad when the stockpiled soil that was specifically conserved to establish a seed bed is spread over the well pad.

Additional soil impacts associated with lease development would occur when heavy precipitation causes water erosion damage. When water saturated segment(s) on the access road become impassable, vehicles may still be driven over the road. Consequently, deep tire ruts would develop. Where impassable segments are created from deep rutting, unauthorized drive-arounds may occur outside the designated travelway of the access road. Road construction requirements and regular maintenance would alleviate potential impacts to the access road from water erosion damage.

##### 3. Vegetation:

The construction of the access road and well pad would remove about 2.6 acres of native vegetation. If it is a producing well, reclamation would not commence until the well is a depleted producer and plugged and abandoned. Vegetation recovery on the access road and well pad would depend on the life of the well. Native vegetation would encroach on the well pad over time with only high traffic areas remaining unvegetated. If drilled as a dry hole and plugged, reclamation of the access road and well pad would immediately follow. Vegetation impacts would be short-term when the access road and well pad re-vegetate within a few years, and the reclamation of the access road and well pad are successful.

##### 4. Invasive & Noxious Weeds:

The construction of an access road and/or well pad may unintentionally contribute to the establishment and spread of noxious weeds. Noxious weed seeds could be carried onto the project areas by construction equipment, the drilling rig and transport vehicles. The main mechanism for seed dispersion on the roads and well pads is by equipment and vehicles that were previously used and or driven across or through

noxious weed infested areas. The potential for the dissemination of invasive and noxious weed seeds may be elevated by the use of construction equipment typically contracted out to companies that may be from other geographic areas in the region. Washing and decontaminating the equipment prior to transporting the equipment onto the construction areas would minimize this impact.

Impacts by noxious weeds will be minimized due to requirements for the company to eradicate the weeds upon discovery. Multiple applications may be required to effectively control the identified populations.

#### 5. Ground Water Quality:

The use of a plastic-lined reserve pit would reduce or eliminate seepage of drilling fluid into the soil and eventually reaching groundwater. Spills or produced fluids (e.g., saltwater, oil, and/or condensate in the event of a breach, overflow, or spill from storage tanks) could result in contamination of the soils onsite, or offsite, and may potentially impact groundwater resources in the long term. The casing and cementing requirements imposed on the proposed well would reduce or eliminate the potential for groundwater contamination from subsurface sources.

#### 6. Wildlife:

Some small wildlife species may be killed and their dens or nests destroyed during construction of the access road and well pad. The construction of the access road and well pad could cause fragmentation of wildlife habitat. The short term negative impact to wildlife would occur during the construction phase of the operation due to noise and habitat destruction. In general, most wildlife species would become habituated to the new facilities. For other wildlife species with a low tolerance to activities, the operations on the well pad would continue to displace wildlife from the area due to ongoing disturbances such as vehicle traffic and equipment maintenance. The conditions of approval would alleviate most losses of wildlife species, such as; fencing the reserve pits, netting storage tanks, installation or other modifications of cones on separator stacks, and timing stipulations. Upon abandonment of the well, the area would revegetate and wildlife would return to previous levels.

7. Range: There would be some minor disruption of livestock grazing in the pasture, specifically on the well pad, during the construction and drilling phase of the well.

#### 8. Visual Resources:

Facilities, such as condensate and produced water or oil storage tanks that rise above eight feet, would provide a geometrically strong vertical and horizontal visual contrast in form and line to the characteristic landscape and vegetation, which have flat, horizontal to slightly rolling form and line. The construction of an access road, well pad and other ancillary facilities, other than facilities greater in height than eight feet, would slightly modify the existing area visual resources. The proposed action is located in an area designated VRM Class IV.

The objective of Class IV is to: "Provide for management activities which require major modification of the existing landscape character...Every attempt, however, should be made to reduce or eliminate activity impacts through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic landscape elements."

The optimum method to repeat these elements would be to remove strong vertical and horizontal contrast through use of low-profile facilities as reflected in the Roswell RMP (1997, p. AP1-4). Depending on the production nature of the well site, multiple low-profile condensate and/or oil or produced water tanks could be necessary to accommodate the project.

Through color manipulation, by painting well facilities to blend with the vegetative and landscape setting,

which is a gray/gray-green drab vegetative color, the view is expected to favorably blend with the form, line, color and texture of the existing landscape. The gray matte color *Slate Gray* from the standard environmental colors most closely approximates the gray/gray-green color of the vegetative setting.

Cumulative adverse visual impacts can be avoided by gradually moving into a more appropriate vegetative/landform setting color scheme. Facilities with low-profile horizontal line and form would facilitate favorable blending as older facilities go out of production and are removed.

#### 9. Recreation:

The construction of the access road, well pad, and other ancillary facilities would slightly modify the existing visual resources of the area. After the well is completed the view should return to the form, line, color, and texture of the existing landscape. The access road and well pad would blend in with other oil and gas facilities in the area that were constructed within the VRM Class IV designation.

#### 10. Cave/Karst:

There would be no impact to known cave entrances, or karst features within the areas of the proposed actions. However, the proposed action is located in a medium karst potential area.

11. Minority or Low-income Populations or Communities: The proposed actions would not impact the minority or low-income populations or communities.

### B. Alternatives:

#### 1. Relocation Alternative:

The alternative of changing the location involved in this action was not analyzed further because no other alternative location would have significantly fewer impacts than, or have a clear advantage over, the proposed location.

#### 2. No Action Alternative:

The no action alternative would constitute denial of the application. This alternative would have no consequential results from the identified environmental impacts. There would, however, be an adverse economic impact to the applicant through the denial of the lessee's right to develop the mineral reserves or through increased costs of accessing those mineral reserves through other means. There have been no significant or unmitigatable impacts identified as a result of this analysis which would warrant selection of the no action alternative.

### C. Mitigation:

The Roswell Field Office; Well Drilling Requirements (Exhibit B), Conditions of Approval (Exhibit C), Permanent Resource Road Requirements (Exhibit D), and the special requirements derived from this EA, would be applied to this proposed action to minimize the surface disturbance and conserve the surrounding landscape.

### D. Cumulative Impacts:

While it is likely that there will be no significant cumulative impact from the proposed action, continued oil and gas development, and other surface-disturbing activities in this area, may potentially have negative cumulative impacts on vegetation, soil, water, livestock, wildlife and visual Resources.

## **V. Consultation and Coordination**

An onsite inspection was conducted on the access road and well pad on 3/21, 2002. In attendance were Gene Simer, District Operations Manager, for Dominion Oklahoma Texas Exploration & Production, Inc., and Richard Hill, Environmental Protection Specialist, BLM Roswell Field Office. Coordination and consultation has occurred with the applicant's agent. The comments and suggestions expressed during the onsite consultation have been incorporated into this EA.

Coordination and consultation has occurred with Roswell Field Office staff specialist. The comments and suggestions expressed during the review of the proposed action and environmental assessment have been incorporated into this EA.

Reviewed by:

/signed Irene Gonzales-Salas  
**Irene Gonzales Salas, Realty Specialist**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**