

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
FOR  
Noble Energy Company  
Huntington Valley 3D Seismic Project Environmental Assessment**

I have reviewed Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-NV-E020-2013-0008-EA, dated August, 2013. After consideration of the environmental effects as described in the EA, I have determined that the proposed action with the mitigation measures and conditions of approval identified in the EA will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required to be prepared. The mitigation measures identified in the EA will be attached as stipulations for this project.

I have determined the proposed action is in conformance with the Elko Resource Management Plan (RMP), as approved March 11, 1987, and the December 2005 Oil & Gas Lease Sale Environmental Assessment, which amended the RMP. The Record of Decision (ROD) for the Elko RMP, page 35, provides, "Maintain public lands open for exploration, development, and production of mineral resources while mitigating conflicts with wildlife, recreation and wilderness resources." In the 1987 ROD for the Elko RMP, page 3, provides that the public lands will be managed under four designations: 1) Limited-subject to no surface occupancy; 2) Limited-subject to seasonal restrictions; 3) Open-subject to standard leasing stipulations; and 4) Closed. The Project is within the area designated as Open-subject to standard leasing stipulations.

The Project is also consistent with other applicable federal, state and local land use policies and plans.

**Context:**

Huntington Valley 3D Seismic Project is located in the area south of Elko in Elko County, Nevada. The seismic lines would be located on both gentle and steep topography. Elevations are above 5000 feet above mean sea level. The area is within the Basin and Range physiographic province, characterized by northerly trending mountains and valleys. There are permanent bodies of water approximately 6 miles northeast of the northern most extent of the proposed seismic line. Zunino/Jiggs reservoir is located within the project area but is currently dry and will be dry during the geophysical operations.

**Intensity:**

1) The environmental assessment has considered impacts of the project. The project will crush vegetation along the seismic route. This crushed vegetation may result in a linear visual color contrast to the viewshed. This crushed vegetation may result in recreationists and cattle using the source lines as access to water. This increased use by cattle and recreationists could have an indirect effect of spreading noxious weeds as well as increased sedimentation. Cultural and biological surveys were conducted to identify areas that need to be avoided (i.e., topographic hazards, structures, wells, etc.). Impacts to wildlife include habitat fragmentation. The seismic design was adjusted following the resource-specific surveys for cultural resources, historic trails, and sensitive wildlife species.

2) *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

The proposed action will not affect public health and safety

3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

The project area is representative of the Basin and Range of eastern Nevada in vegetative condition and ecological functionality. The most unique characteristic of the project area is its proximity to the Hastings Cutoff of the California Trail and to the Cedar Ridge and Red Springs Wilderness Study Areas.

4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

The effects of Huntington Valley 3D Seismic Project are well known and are not highly controversial. The EA was released to the Public for a 15 day review period.

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

There are no known effects of the proposed action identified in the EA which are considered uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. All seismic exploration methods proposed to be employed are accepted standard practices.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The proposed action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. All future seismic projects, if they occur would be subject to the same environmental assessment standards and independent decision making. Future exploration drilling actions would be analyzed in an appropriate NEPA document and subject to independent decision making.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

No significant cumulative impacts have been identified in the EA.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

The Hastings Cutoff of the California Trail, a resource previously determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, will be crossed by the project in a number of locations. No adverse impacts are anticipated as a result of the current proposal because exploration activities would be routed around cultural properties or would be confined to existing roads through the cultural sites. Source lines will not cross the trail and receiver lines will be placed by hand over the trail.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973.*

Lahontan cutthroat trout (LCT), a federally listed threatened species, occur in a number of streams near the project area and within the larger area identified as the CESA for special status species (refer to Map 5, Environmental Assessment). Streams which support LCT in the vicinity of the project area include Gennette, Smith, Carville, Cottonwood, Green Mountain, Gilbert and McCutcheon creeks. Although these drainages support viable populations (BLM and NDOW GIS file data), most occupied habitat occurs upstream of the project area on lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service. Although LCT may sporadically occur in the lower reaches of these streams on private lands, only the upper reaches are considered occupied and as having potential for recovery (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1995 and NDOW 2005). Cutthroat likely historically occurred in Huntington Creek, located within the project area; however, poor habitat conditions make this stream unsuitable for LCT (BLM file data). A number of additional streams along the west side of the Ruby Mountains and one stream on the east side of the Pinyon Range support LCT and occur within the CESA.

The project is not expected to impact LCT since occupied habitat primarily occurs outside the project boundary and since project design features have been incorporated into the proposed action to prevent impacts to water resources including riparian and wetland areas. These features are described in the section on Water Resources, Wetland and Riparian Areas on pages 18 and 19 of the Environmental Assessment.

#### Literature Cited

Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW). 2005. Lahontan cutthroat trout species management plan for the Upper Humboldt River Basin. Elko, Nevada.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1995. Recovery plan for the Lahontan cutthroat trout. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Portland, Oregon.

Surface disturbing activities also have a probability of occurring in the vicinity of resident small mammal and reptile populations. Impacts include temporary individual or population displacement from preferred to marginal habitat and potential for animal mortality or behavioral changes in the vicinity of the exploration/construction site due to either interaction with construction activity or by being unable to adapt to new habitat conditions. It has been determined the activities will not likely adversely affect any of these species or their critical habitat.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The proposed action will not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

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**Richard E. Adams,  
Field Manager  
Tuscarora Field Office**

**Sept. 11, 2013**

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**Date**