

# Master Leasing Plan (MLP) Assessment Vernal

Utah State Office  
Vernal Field Office  
November 2010

## **Name and Location of MLP Area:**

Vernal MLP. Located in Eastern Uinta Basin-Northeastern Utah

## **Internal or External Proposal?**

### DESCRIPTION:

INTERNAL/EXTERNAL COMBINED: The proposed Vernal MLP includes two areas within the Vernal Field Office (VFO) and combines them into one MLP effort comprising a total of 650,157 acres. The two original externally-submitted areas (Dinosaur Lowlands and Eastern Book Cliffs-Piceance Basin) are separate and distinct areas, but since they are within the same Field Office and managed under the same Resource Management Plan (RMP), they will be analyzed in a single MLP. Although the internally-considered areas vary from the two external MLP proposals, they contain significant overlap. The proposed Vernal MLP has been delineated to maximize unleased areas and include suspended and sold-but-not-issued protested parcels.

The northern portion of the Vernal proposal (Dinosaur Lowlands) includes 266,893 acres and generally wraps around the western portion of the Dinosaur National Monument (NM). It excludes the highly developed producing gas field on the southwest edge of SUWA's proposed area. The southern portion of the Vernal proposal (Eastern Book Cliffs) includes 293,573 acres and excludes most of the leased and developed lands included in SUWA's proposal.

More specific descriptions of the two individual areas are included in Attachment 1 (Dinosaur Lowlands) and Attachment 2 (Eastern Book Cliffs).

The map labeled Vernal A illustrates the MLP proposal (external and internal) locations with the authorized, suspended, pending and deferred leases within Utah. The Vernal B map shows oil and gas fields, shut in wells, abandoned wells and producing wells. The Utah BLM recommendation is the internal Vernal MLP as delineated on the map Vernal A.

## **Does the area meet the criteria and qualify for MLP analysis?**

Yes, because the Utah BLM recommendation for a Vernal MLP has been delineated to maximize unleased areas and include suspended and sold-but-not-issued protested parcels.

## **Supporting Information**

### **1. What Resource Management Plan(s) are applicable to the MLP area?**

Vernal Field Office Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP); dated October 31, 2008<sup>1</sup> (as maintained).

### **2. Potential resource issues raised in the MLP proposal:**

Similar issues were brought up in each external MLP proposal. The main resource issues raised were citizen proposed wilderness, wildlife, and resources in areas previously considered for designation an Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. Specific details can be found in attachments 1 and 2.

### **3. How does the current Plan address these issues?**

By and large, the issues identified in the external proposals are addressed in the 2008 Vernal RMP. A full discussion of those issues can be found in Attachments 1 and 2.

### **If MLP analysis is warranted, describe how and when MLP analysis will likely occur:**

RMP revision was completed in 2008. The area would be undertaken as a “stand-alone” MLP effort and will be prioritized after the Director approves Utah’s MLP proposals.

### **Describe the process used for review:**

For each of the proposals (external and internal), interdisciplinary teams looked at a range of GIS layers to determine if the proposal area fit the four criteria listed to require a MLP. The following GIS layers were reviewed as part of the interdisciplinary review process: existing leases, wells (active and plugged-and-abandoned), land ownership, deferred parcels, unissued leases with pending protests, leases which are under suspension due to court decisions, and expressions of interest (EOI) - all overlaid with resource data. The resource data included WSA’s, citizen proposed wilderness areas (Red Rocks), ACECs, Wild and Scenic Rivers, BLM natural areas, and especially sensitive wildlife habitat data like sage grouse and white tailed prairie dog. The mineral potential used for the Vernal RMP was also considered during the review process.

### **Describe how and why each of the following criteria are met or not met:**

The criteria were applied to each of the areas within the Vernal MLP proposal separately and then combined at management direction.

#### **1. A substantial portion of the area to be analyzed in the MLP is not currently leased.**

EXTERNAL Combined Proposal – 35% of the BLM land is unleased.

INTERNAL Combined Proposal – 35% of the BLM land is unleased.

#### **2. There is a majority Federal mineral interest.**

EXTERNAL Combined Proposal – 77% Federal

INTERNAL Combined Proposal – 79% Federal

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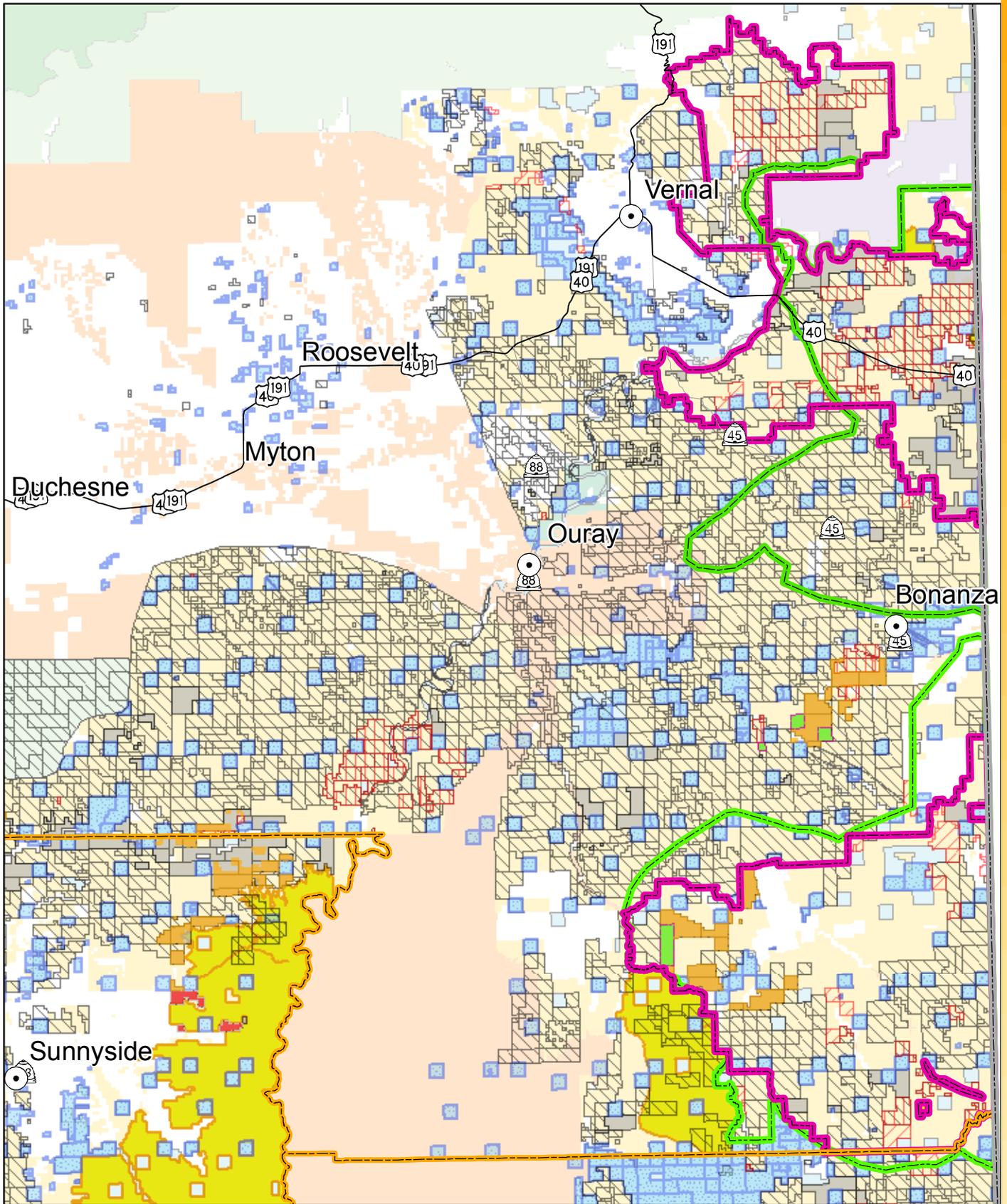
<sup>1</sup> Accessed online at: [http://www.blm.gov/ut/st/en/fo/vernal/planning/rmp/rod\\_approved\\_rmp.html](http://www.blm.gov/ut/st/en/fo/vernal/planning/rmp/rod_approved_rmp.html).

**3. The oil and gas industry has expressed a specific interest in leasing, and there is a moderate or high potential for oil and gas confirmed by the discovery of oil and gas in the general area.**

The Proposed Vernal MLP area contains a combination of deferred parcels, pending, and suspended parcels. Map Vernal A and Vernal B illustrates the deferred, pending, suspended along with the oil and gas wells in the Vernal MLP proposal area.

**4. Additional analysis or information is needed to address likely resource or cumulative impacts if oil and gas development were to occur.**

The area contains several leases that were suspended following litigation and as addressed in the attachments, other resource issues were identified. The Utah BLM is working with stakeholders and EPA to develop and air resource management strategy which will address the emerging air quality issues in the Uinta Basin. That effort will continue independent of MLP efforts but would be incorporated into the Vernal MLP. The northern portion of the proposed MLP is adjacent to Dinosaur National Monument. Past coordination with the Monument has been excellent and will continue. The proposed MLP shares a common boundary with Colorado and Utah BLM will coordinate with Colorado to ensure consistency across the state line.



Leases At Issue

- Issued\_Suspended
- Sold\_Not Issued

Stiles Report Recommendations

- Closed
- Defer
- Lease
- Internal Analysis Area
- External Analysis Area
- Authorized Parcels
- Deferred Parcels
- SITLA Parcels

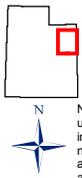
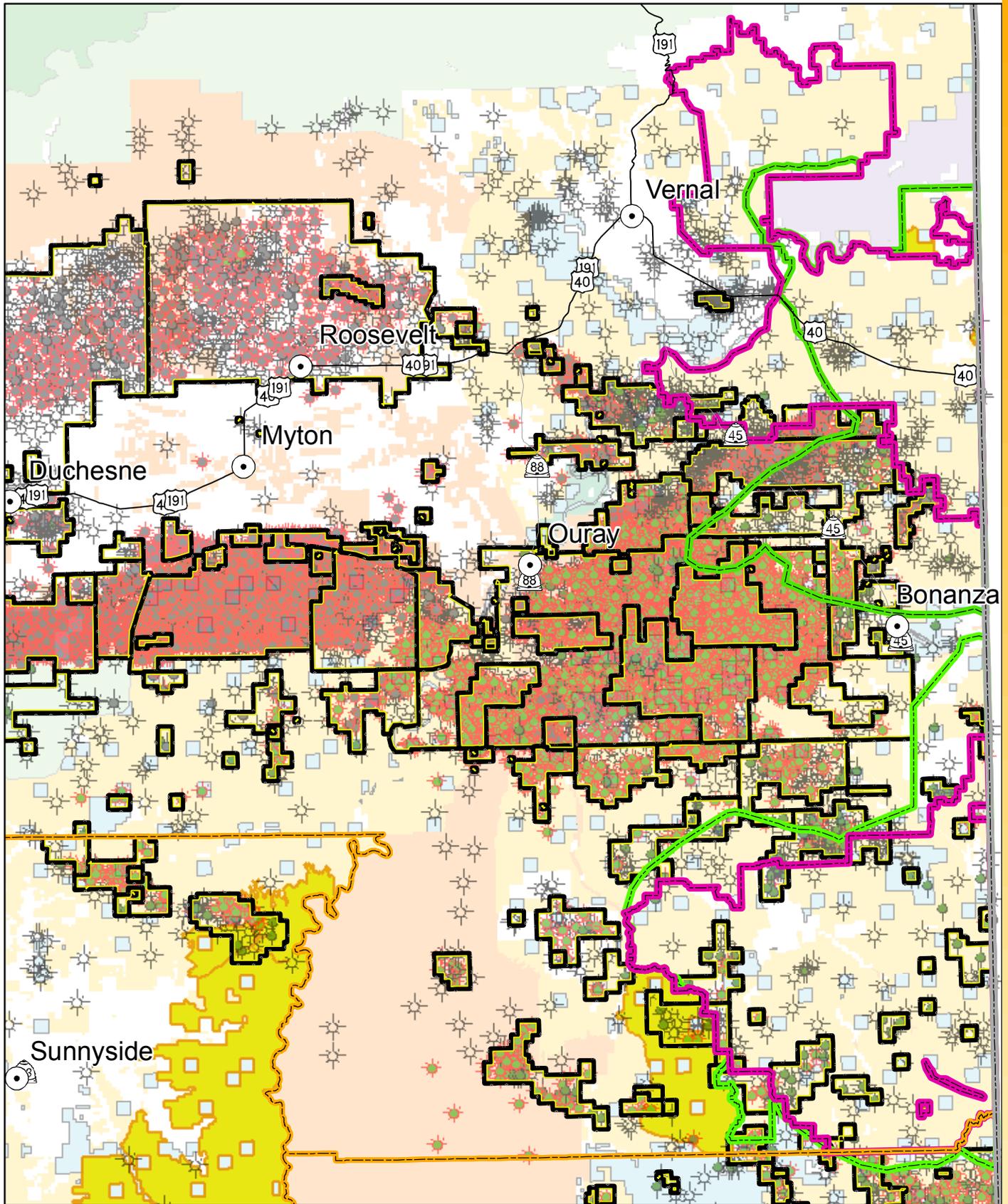
- BLM
- BLM Wilderness
- WSA
- USFS
- NPS
- State
- Private
- Military
- N. A. Res.



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1:628,086 0 2.5 5 10 Miles

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|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|------------|--------------|
| ✱ Abandoned          | <b>Wells</b>             | ● Shut In Gas Well | ■ BLM      | ■ USFS       |
| ✱ Producing Gas Well | ● Shut In Oil Well       | ■ BLM Wilderness   | ■ NPS      | ■ N. A. Res. |
| ✱ Producing Oil Well | ■ Oil and Gas Fields     | ■ WSA              | ■ State    | ■ Private    |
|                      | ■ Internal Analysis Area |                    | ■ Military |              |
|                      | ■ External Analysis Area |                    |            |              |

