



"David Garbett"
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07/14/2011 09:44 PM

To <UT_Comments@blm.gov>
cc
bcc
Subject Exhibits 5 to Comments on November 2011 Oil and Gas
Lease Sale

Mr. Ogaard,

Please find attached to this email exhibits that accompany comments that will be submitted by the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance tomorrow. This is the fifth of numerous emails to follow with attachments.

Thank you,

David Garbett
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Excerpts of EPA Comments on GNB Draft EIS.pdf



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8**

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OCT 01 2010

Ref: 8EPR-N

Jeff Rawson, Associate State Director
Bureau of Land Management
Utah State Office
P.O. Box 45155
Salt Lake City, Utah 84145-0155

Re: Comments on the Greater Natural Buttes
Draft Environmental Impact Statement
CEQ # 20100253

Dear Mr. Rawson:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 8 has reviewed the Greater Natural Buttes (GNB) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prepared by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in response to a proposal by Kerr-McGee Oil and Gas Onshore LP (KMG), a wholly owned subsidiary of Anadarko Petroleum Corporation, to conduct infill oil and gas development in the Greater Natural Buttes Project Area (GNBPA) in Uintah County, Utah. Our comments are provided for your consideration pursuant to our responsibilities and authority under Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. Section 4332(2)(C), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act (CAA), 42 U.S.C. Section 7609. It is EPA's responsibility to provide an independent review and evaluation of the potential environmental impacts of this project, which includes a rating of the environmental impact of the preferred alternative and the adequacy of the NEPA document.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Four alternatives for infill development in the 162,911 acre GNBPA are analyzed in the Draft EIS. The No Action Alternative would continue drilling and completion of previously approved wells, adding 1,102 wells to the 1,562 wells existing in October 2007. The Proposed Action Alternative consists of KMG's proposed infill drilling of an additional 3,675 wells drilled from a maximum of 3,041 well pads. Up to 20-acre surface spacing would be allowed under this alternative. Wells would be drilled at an average rate of 358 wells per year over 10 years. The Resource Protection Alternative is BLM's Preferred Alternative. This alternative consists of the same number of wells as the Proposed Action, but well pads would be limited to 40-acre surface spacing. Thus, there would be approximately 1,484 new well pads, leading to a reduction of surface disturbance for this alternative. The drilling rate and bottom-hole spacing would be the same as the Proposed Action. The Optimal Recovery Alternative maximizes the recovery of

natural gas resources by increasing well spacing (surface and bottom-hole) to 10-acres. Under this alternative, 13,446 new wells would be drilled over a period of 20 years.

BIFURCATED REVIEW PROCESS

EPA and BLM have met and conferred several times to discuss the type of air quality assessment approach needed in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impacts to air quality from GNB. BLM has committed to present this additional air quality analysis in a supplement to the Draft EIS and will notify the public of this commitment as well as the future availability of the supplemental information for public review and comment. Therefore, in this letter EPA is providing our comments on the Draft EIS except for those related to air quality. EPA will reserve our comments on the air quality impacts from GNB and the air quality analysis in the Draft EIS until EPA has had an opportunity to review the additional air analysis during the public comment period. EPA will provide a rating of the overall Draft EIS, as supplemented, at that time. EPA refers to this process as a "bifurcated review process." EPA believes that bifurcation provides an effective means of ensuring adequate analysis and full public disclosure of potential impacts, as well as opportunity for improved environmental outcomes. EPA commends BLM's willingness to provide additional air quality analysis that we believe is critical to understanding the impacts of GNB. We are committed to assisting BLM with preparation of the supplemental air quality information to ensure that it addresses our significant air quality issues for GNB.

EPA ISSUES

Based on EPA's review of the Draft EIS, we have identified several significant issues with the project. Our three primary issues are air quality impacts to ozone, near-field air quality impacts, and impacts to surface and ground water resources. As discussed above, EPA is deferring comments on air quality impacts. EPA's review is based on the Resource Protection Alternative; if BLM selects a different alternative as the Preferred Alternative, we may have additional comments.

We have briefly highlighted our water resource issues in this letter. In addition, the enclosed detailed comments provide further discussion of our significant concerns regarding protection and characterization of water resources, as well as our comments on potential impacts to environmental justice communities, impacts to special status species, clarification of jurisdiction in the project area, spill prevention, and reclamation potential in the GNBPA. We note that we found the discussion of cumulative impacts provided in Chapter 5 to be thorough, and appreciated the useful inclusion of relevant technical information in the Appendices to the Draft EIS.

EPA believes that groundwater and surface water protection is a significant issue associated with the GNB oil and gas development. The potential for significant impacts to water resources exists during all project stages, including drilling, well pad construction, production, hydraulic fracturing, produced water disposal, and freshwater withdrawal. A complete

monitoring plan and program to track any surface water or groundwater impacts as drilling and production operations occur should be included in the EIS. Mitigation measures should also be developed and implemented for this project to protect both surface and ground water. For example, we note that the characteristics of the Bird's Nest Aquifer may lead to difficulties in adequate casing construction for production and disposal wells and may require specific mitigation measures.

Characterization of the location and quality of groundwater resources present in the project area is critical to understanding potential for impact; however, the Draft EIS presents only a general discussion of project area aquifers. Substantially more detail characterizing groundwater resources should be provided in the Final EIS. EPA does not believe that deferring a detailed groundwater evaluation to site-specific well reviews provides a complete analysis of cumulative environmental impacts to the aquifers. Further detail and clarification on the proposed produced water management is also needed in the Final EIS. The Draft EIS indicates that produced water would be disposed of via underground injection wells, but also includes the possibility of trucking low-quality produced water that is ineligible for injection to existing water disposal and treatment facilities or recycling of produced water. The Final EIS should assess potential impacts from disposal wells and alternative disposal methods. The associated environmental impacts of fresh water use should also be evaluated in the Final EIS.

EPA additionally considers impacts to surface water from runoff as a significant issue for the proposed project. Runoff of sediment and salts is noted in the Draft EIS as a concern in the GNBPA, and we believe that salt and sediment impacts to surface water in the project area should be given significant attention during planning and construction for GNB.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Draft EIS. We look forward to working with you during preparation of the air quality supplement to this document. If you have any questions about our comments, please contact me at 303-312-6004, or you may contact Molly Brodin of my staff at 303-312-6577.

Sincerely,



Larry Svoboda
Director, NEPA Compliance and Review Program
Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation

Enclosure: EPA's Detailed Comments

cc: Daniel Picard, U&O Agency Superintendent, BIA
Frances Poowegup, Vice-Chairwoman, Ute Indian Tribe

