

CHAPTER 7

IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENTS OF RESOURCES BY CUMULATIVE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In order to place these commitments in proper perspective, the reader is referred to Chapter 5 where a summary of these cumulative regional impacts (through 1990) may be found.

Approximately 2 billion tons of coal would be extracted and consumed as a result of regional coal mining operations through 1990, with an additional 100 to 200 million tons left as unrecoverable by present mining methods.

A large quantity of sand, gravel, and scoria estimated to be over 2 million cubic yards, would be committed to construction of mine facilities, and roads and houses to accommodate the increased population.

Energy, in the form of petroleum products and electricity, would be consumed in order to extract, convert, or ship the coal, for other development activities, and by the increased population.

The traditional life-style of towns and counties in the region would undergo additional integration with newcomers' life-styles. By 1990, newcomers' life-styles would likely predominate.

Loss of human life due to rail, highway, or mine accidents would be irreversible and irretrievable. The estimated potential fatality rate for coal strip mining is 1 per 14.3 million tons of coal produced, or 12 lives per year for the 174 million tons of coal mined annually by 1990.

Destruction of the physical structure of the premining aquifers would be irreversible. Water in aquifers which develop after reclamation would be of poorer quality than in the premining aquifers due to high levels of dissolved solids and ions. The water may be unsuitable for drinking water or agricultural uses.

Some premining point-watering sources at 330 acres of pond or wells and along 49 miles of creek would be destroyed; the resulting loss in water source density and dispersion could cause an unquantifiable reduction in wildlife habitat and grazing range.

Existing soil associations, vegetative forage production of 9,700 animal unit months (AUMs) on a cumulative basis by 1990, total wildlife habitat and carrying capac-

ity, and recreation land base would be permanently lost on 3,242 acres due to expansion of urban areas.

The aquatic habitat presently existing on the mine sites (330 acres of pond or wells and 49 miles of stream) would never be replaced, but a different community would naturally reestablish itself.

The quality of the "primitive" recreation experience would decline, and damage occurring to natural values throughout the region because of overuse or inadequate recreation management could be irreversible.

Wildlife presently occupying mine sites and other areas of disturbance would be displaced and lost. One percent of the regional pronghorn and mule deer populations would be lost as a direct result of habitat destruction. The loss of all wildlife populations on disturbed areas would be an irreversible commitment of wildlife resources. The loss of cliffs, rocky outcroppings, and other special habitat features would be irreversible.

Houses, service facilities, utilities, and roads built to accommodate the increased population would irreversibly commit visual resource Class II, III, and IV areas to Class V.

Land surfaces consisting of cliffs and abrupt breaks could not be restored to their original conformation after disturbance.

Cultural resources in areas of surface disturbance would be committed to either destruction or salvage; in either case, additional information would not be available to future researchers. However, present researchers would have the benefit of information gained from material exposed through mining operations.

The removal by amateurs of collectible minerals, fossils, or cultural resources would be an irreversible loss.

The Buckskin Mine is included in the cumulative regional development discussed in this chapter.