

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Northwestern Resources Company has applied for a coal lease under the lease-by-application regulations. The lease being applied for, called the West Rocky Butte tract, contains about 50 million tons of federal coal under 390 acres of private surface. The lease application tract is contiguous to the Rocky Butte lease, which Northwestern Resources Company has recently acquired.

The Rocky Butte lease will expire in February 1993. If the Bureau of Land Management holds a lease sale for the West Rocky Butte tract and if Northwestern Resources is the successful bidder, the two leases could be combined into a logical mining unit and a new diligence period would be established.

The Bureau of Land Management is required to take action on the lease application. The action considered is whether or not to hold a lease sale.

The holding of a lease sale would allow Northwestern Resources Company to acquire the lease, submit an application to form a logical mining unit and open a new mine. As such, this would be a major federal action, and the Bureau of Land Management has determined that the action requires the preparation of an environmental impact statement.

Two alternatives are analyzed in this environmental impact statement. The first alternative is the Proposed Action, which would result in the holding of a lease sale, an application for a Logical Mining Unit (assuming Northwestern Resources Company is the successful bidder), and the opening of a new mine. The Proposed Action, including lands added to the West Rocky Butte tract by the BLM (Option A), is the Preferred Alternative of the BLM. The second alternative, the No Action Alternative, is defined as the rejection of the lease application. Under this alternative, the lease would not be issued, the existing Rocky Butte lease would expire on February 1, 1993, and a new mine would not be opened. For purposes of analysis, the No Action Alternative assumes that the coal would never be mined.

Alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail are: revising the mine plan to bring the coal production rate into line with BLM coal demand forecasts, delineating the tract differently to make the LBA as attractive as possible to potential bidders and avoid bypassing federal coal, leasing the West Rocky Butte tract for a stand-alone mine, delaying the lease sale, and analyzing the impacts of using different mining technologies. These alternatives are not analyzed in detail in this EIS because the environmental impacts of these alternatives would be within the range of the impacts described for the two principal alternatives, or the alternatives are considered unreasonable, impractical, or outside the scope of this EIS.

While selection of the Proposed Action would be a necessary action for the Rocky Butte Mine to open as planned, it is not the only action that would be required. Numerous permits must be acquired to open a mine, and while it was assumed for the purposes of environmental analysis that the permits could be acquired, no prejudgment that this is so is to be construed from this assumption.

The Rocky Butte Mine would join 18 operating mines in the Wyoming portion of the Powder River Basin and would be part of a contiguous block of five mines south of Gillette. The other mines in this block are the Caballo, Belle Ayr, Caballo Rojo, and Cordero mines. The mine would add incrementally to the environmental effects of the other mines in the region. No significant long-term adverse impacts were identified which cannot be mitigated through normal operating procedures or special lease or permit conditions. There would be impacts to all resources during mining. There would be impacts to the topography, vegetation, water resources, and fish and wildlife resources which would extend beyond the mine's existence. There would be impacts to cultural and paleontological resources which would be removed and mitigated through data recovery. Impacts of the two alternatives are summarized in Table 4-1 of Chapter 4.