

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**  
**For Stewart Point 6D3-28 and 10B4-28 Wells**  
**LEASE WYW08592**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT WY-100-EA11-145**  
**JUNE 16, 2011**

**Introduction**

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide QEP Energy, Inc. (QEP) the opportunity to more effectively define the recoverable boundaries of its gas lease on federal mineral estate in the project area. The need for the proposed action is established by the BLM's responsibility under the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 and the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) to respond to the APDs filed by QEP for permits to drill the wells on their valid oil and gas lease.

**Summary of Proposed Action**

QEP submitted APDs for two natural gas delineation wells, the Stewart Point 6D3-28 and the 10B4-28 (formerly the Stewart Point 9B3-28). They would be drilled from the proposed Stewart Point 7-28 well pad in the SWNE, Sec. 28, T. 33 N., R. 109 W. The wells would be drilled into and produce from federal lease WYW08592.

The proposed action would include a new 5.3-acre well pad (including cuts, fills, and topsoil pile) and a 1,904-foot long by 50-foot wide access road right-of-way (ROW) that would leave the existing SP 3-28 well pad and proceed in a southeasterly direction to the proposed SP 7-28 well pad. The access road would result in approximately 2.2 acres of new surface disturbance.

QEP has submitted applications for the pipeline ROWs (WYW-172212, WYW-172213, and WYW-172214) plus a temporary use permit for construction (WYW-172236). QEP would place the three pipelines containing gas, produced water, and condensate in the access roadbed to minimize surface disturbance and visual effects. No additional new surface disturbance would occur in the access road ROW.

The total new surface disturbance for the proposed action, including the well pad, access road and pipeline would be approximately 7.5 acres. Approximately 4.3 acres of the well pad would be reclaimed during interim reclamation leaving a one-acre disturbance footprint on the well pad. The access road would be reclaimed back to a 30-foot graveled roadbed leaving a 1.2-acre travelway. Approximately 2.2 acres of surface disturbance would remain for the life of the wells, expected to be 20 to 30 years. If the delineation wells are productive, it is anticipated that the well pad would be expanded in the future to accommodate several directional production wells.

**Context**

This EA tiers to following documents, which are included in the EA analysis by reference:

*Pinedale Resource Management Plan (Pinedale RMP), approved November 26, 2008; and the Record of Decision, Pinedale Anticline Oil and Gas Exploration and Development Project (PAPA ROD), approved September 12, 2008.*

## **Rationale**

The proposed action (Alternative I), was chosen because 1) it best meets the purpose and need, 2) it best meets QEP's delineation goals, and 3) the effects to the environmental resources in the vicinity of the proposed action are within the range of acceptable effects as defined in the Pinedale RMP and PAPA ROD.

## **Effects of Selected Alternative**

The proposed action would affect the following resources:

- **Soil Resources**: The proposed action would result in approximately 7.5 acres of new surface disturbance in highly erosive upland soils, which are particularly susceptible to wind and water erosion. Implementing erosion and drainage controls and timely interim reclamation of all but 2.2 acres of the well pad and access road, would reduce the effects of the proposed action on soil resources.
- **Vegetation Resources**: The proposed action would result in the temporary loss of 7.5 acres of sagebrush overstory and mid-stature bunchgrass understory. It would also increase the potential for the invasion of non-native species and noxious weeds. The timely interim reclamation of unused portions of the well pad and access road, and the implementation of design features, such as maintaining topsoil viability, planting native species, and monitoring for weeds, would reduce the effects of the proposed action on vegetation resources.
- **Wildlife Resources**: The proposed action would affect wintering mule deer and Greater sage-grouse, and mule deer migrating to and from the Ryegrass and Mesa winter ranges. It would affect pygmy rabbit habitats and would be located approximately 0.5 miles from an active raptor nest. The construction and drilling phase, which would have the greatest negative effects on wildlife, would be temporary and conducted during a period when mule deer, sage-grouse, and raptors are largely absent from the area. The timely reclamation of the unused portions of the well pad and access road and the planting of native forage and browse vegetation, as well as, seasonal stipulations, placed on the proposed action; would reduce, but not eliminate effects to mule deer, sage-grouse, raptors and pygmy rabbits.
- **Cultural Resources**: One National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)-eligible historic property, 48SU3191, would be affected by the proposed action. The Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (WYSHPO) has concurred that any adverse effects would be mitigated through the implementation of a discovery plan in accordance with the Wyoming State Protocol. The proposed action would also be visible from a second NHPA-eligible historic property, site 48SU2019. BLM has determined through extensive tribal consultation and national register evaluation that the proposed action, located more than one mile from 48SU2019, would neither directly nor indirectly affect any aspect of integrity important to this site.
- **Visual Resources**: The proposed action would be located in Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class II and III, and visible from Hwy 191, just south of the town of Pinedale; Bridle Bit Lane and Ruby Hill key observation points (KOP), and from

subdivisions and ranches along Hwy 191. The construction phase of the proposed action, which would have the highest visibility, would be temporary. The effects of the production footprint and access road, as mitigated by the design features described in the SP 6D3-28 surface use plan (SUP) and the Revised VRPP, May 23, 2011, would reduce adverse visual effects and meet the objectives of VMR Class II and III.

- Recreation Resources: Construction and well drilling would affect the visual and aesthetic experience of individuals engaging in recreation activities, such as hunting, fishing, and horseback riding. The increase in roads may increase off-road vehicle use. The construction phase would be temporary and the timely interim reclamation of the unused portions of the well pad and access road would reduce the affects of the proposed action on recreation resources.
- Livestock Grazing: The proposed action would result in the temporary loss of 7.5 acres of grazing forage in the Mt. Airy Common Allotment (0.5 AUMs). Timely interim reclamation of all by 2.2 acres (0.2 AUMs) of the unused portions of the well pad and access road and implementation of mitigation measures, such as maintaining topsoil viability, planting native grasses and shrubs, and monitoring interim reclamation for invasive species and noxious weeds would reduce adverse effects to grazing livestock. The proposed action would be located more than 500 feet from any range improvement.
- Water Resources: In accordance with the PAPA ROD, the proposed action would be located outside any 100-year floodplain or the 500-foot buffer of any wetland. In accordance with the Pinedale RMP, the proposed well pad would be located more than 500 feet from the channel of a small intermittent drainage located southeast of the proposed well pad. Erosion and drainage controls, as well as, a spill prevention plan, would reduce the effects of sedimentation and contamination of any surface streams.

Proper well construction, including cementing both the deep conductor and surface casing to the surface, would protect fresh-water aquifers from contamination. No domestic wells would be affected by the proposed action.

- Residences: The nearest residence would be located 1.2 miles from the proposed action. In accordance with the PAPA ROD, no dwelling would be located within 0.25 miles of the proposed action. Pad construction and well drilling would be temporary and design features proposed for the production pad and access road in the Revised VRPP, May 23, 2011, would reduce visual and audible effects of the proposed action on residents.
- Air Quality: The construction and drilling phase and the production facilities would affect air quality by emitting nitrous oxides and volatile organic carbons which affect visibility and ozone levels. The construction phase would be temporary and mitigation measures, such as controlling fugitive dust, flaring in a flare box, utilizing a closed-loop system without reserve pits, and using a rig with Tier II engines would reduce the effects of the proposed action during the drilling phase. Timely interim reclamation of all unused portions of the well pad and access road, utilizing the liquids gathering system

(LGS) to reduce traffic to the production site and monitoring emissions from production facilities would further reduce the long-term effects of the proposed action on air quality.

- Global Climate Change: The proposed action would affect global climate change during both the drilling phase, which would be temporary; and the production phase, expected to be 20 to 30 years. It is unknown what the net effects from these two wells would be on actual climate change.
- Hazardous Wastes: Accidental spills, pipeline ruptures and potential exposures to hazardous wastes as a result of the proposed action are expected to be localized. Materials Data Safety Sheets (MSDS) would be available for all chemicals used and a contingency plan for managing accidental releases, spills, and fires involving hazardous materials would be handled according to the operator's SPCCP. QEP would abide by all applicable federal, state, and local laws or regulations and stipulations regarding the handling of wastes reducing the effects of hazardous materials.

### **Intensity**

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the effects anticipated from Alternative I, the proposed action, decision relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) below:

#### ***1. Effects that may be both beneficial and adverse.***

The proposed action would affect resources as described above and analyzed in this EA. None of those effects are beyond the range of effects analyzed in either the Pinedale RMP or the PAPA ROD, to which this EA is tiered.

#### ***2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.***

The proposed action is designed to have minimum impact on public health and safety. The transportation of equipment to the project location would be in conformance with state and federal laws. In accordance with the PAPA ROD, the proposed action is located more than 0.25 miles from any residences or dwellings. QEP would implement mitigation measures to reduce the effects of fugitive dust, flaring, increased traffic, and emissions during the construction and drilling phase, which would take approximately 80 days. Gas, condensate, and produced water would be gathered and transported via QEP's LGS, which would reduce truck traffic and emissions during the production phase. A contingency plan for managing accidental releases, spills, and fires involving hazardous materials would be handled according to the operator's Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure Plan (SPCCP). QEP would abide by all applicable federal, state, and local laws or regulations.

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

The following unique features of the geographic area surrounding and including the proposed action, which would be affected are:

Wildlife: The proposed action would be located within crucial winter range for mule deer and in a delineated migration route to and from the Ryegrass and Mesa winter ranges. It would be located within a Greater sage-grouse winter concentration area, approximately 0.5 miles of an active Swainson's hawk nest, and within pygmy-rabbit habitat. The construction and drilling phase, which would have the most negative effects on wildlife, would be temporary and conducted during a period when mule deer, sage-grouse, and raptors are largely absent from the area. The timely reclamation of the unused portions of the well pad and access road, leaving 2.2 acres bare for the life of the wells; and the planting of native forage and browse vegetation, and seasonal stipulations, which have been placed on the proposed action, would reduce the effects to mule deer, sage-grouse, raptors, and pygmy rabbits.

Cultural Resources: The proposed action would affect a portion of 48SU3191, a NRHP-eligible historic property. The WYSHPO has concurred that any adverse effects would be mitigated through the implementation of a discovery plan in accordance with the Wyoming State Protocol. Tribal consultation affirmed that relocation of the proposed SP 7-28 well pad to its current location and implementation of the Revised VRPP, May 23, 2011, would be sufficient to protect 48SU2019 from adverse effects. The BLM will also ensure that the tribes continue to have access to the site and it is not physically damaged. They will continue consultation with the tribes regarding use and management of the site and any future proposals in the vicinity of the site.

Visual Resources: The proposed action would be located in an area of VRM Class II and III, and visible from the town of Pinedale, Hwy 191, the Bridle Bit and Ruby Hill KOPs, and from subdivisions and ranches along Hwy 191. The construction phase of the proposed action, which would have the highest visibility, would be temporary. The effects of the production phase of the proposed action, as mitigated by the measures described in the Revised VRPP, May 23, 2011, would reduce adverse visual effects.

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

The NOSs and APDs for the wells were available for public review at the front desk of the BLM PFO for a minimum of 30 days from the day of receipt at the PFO. Three public tours have been conducted for the proposed action, extensive public scoping was conducted as part of the PAPA FSEIS process, and two additional episodes of public scoping took place for the proposed action. As a result, 37 public comments were received and addressed in this EA and/or the Pinedale RMP and PAPA ROD.

As a result of all the scoping, public tours, onsite visits, and staff analysis of the proposal, the following issues were raised with this proposed action:

- How will crucial mule deer winter range and important migration routes be affected by the proposed action and alternatives?
- How will the proposed action and alternatives impact Greater sage-grouse nesting habitat?
- How will the cultural and sacred values of archaeological sites be affected?

- How will the character of the viewshed from the KOPs and in the sensitive viewshed area be modified by pad construction and well drilling, including through soil erosion and visible cut and fill slopes?
- How will the proposed action and alternatives affect air quality, including ozone levels?
- How will residents in Pinedale and near the project area be impacted by industrial activities, such as traffic, dust, lights and noise?
- How will the proposed action and alternatives impact surface and groundwater quality?

The issues above have been addressed in this EA, the PAPA ROD and/or the Pinedale RMP.

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

Implementation of the proposed action would not pose highly uncertain, unique or unknown risks to the human environment. Project design features have been built into the proposed action would reduce or avoid any adverse effects to area resources.

***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 is for two natural gas delineation wells. If the wells are productive, it is anticipated that the well pad would be expanded to include multiple directional production wells. Any future actions would undergo the NEPA process.

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

The effects to air quality, global climate change, soil resources, vegetation resources, livestock grazing, and recreation would not be individually significant but cumulatively significant when considered in conjunction with the other natural gas wells and facilities in a designated area of intensive natural gas development. These effects were analyzed and mitigated through the PAPA ROD, the Pinedale RMP, the Stewart Point 6D3-28 SUP (master well), and the Revised VRPP. Air quality for the area has been also analyzed and mitigated through the PAPA FSEIS. No new or unconsidered effects would result from the proposed action.

***8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, buildings, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.***

The proposed project would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources. The WYSHPO has concurred that any adverse effects to site 48SU3193 by the proposed action would be mitigated through the implementation of a discovery plan in accordance with the Wyoming State Protocol. Tribal consultation affirmed that relocation of the proposed SP 7-28 well pad to its current location and implementation of the Revised VRPP, May 23, 2011, would be sufficient to protect 48SU2019 from adverse effects.

***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 Endangered Species Act of 1973.***

No effects to threatened and endangered species are expected from the implementation of the proposed action.

***10. Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.***

The implementation of Alternative I, the proposed action, would not threaten a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. The proposed action is consistent with actions appropriate for the PAPA as defined in the Pinedale RMP.

Resource review and analyses have been coordinated with other federal and state agencies. Environmental protection measures incorporated into the proposed action are outlined in the PAPA ROD. The resources determined to be potentially affected by the proposed action were analyzed in this EA specific to the proposed action. Stipulations to further reduce the effects of the proposed action are included in Appendix I.

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

On the basis of the information contained in the EA (WY-100-EA11-145), and all other information available to me, it is my determination that:

1. The implementation of the proposed action will not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in the Pinedale RMP (Pinedale Resource Management Plan/Final Record of Decision, November 26, 2008).
2. The implementation of the proposed action will not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in the PAPA ROD (Record of Decision, Pinedale Anticline Oil and Gas Exploration and Development Project September 12, 2008).
3. The proposed action will not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment.

Therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) or a supplement to the existing environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and to the intensity of the impacts described in the EA or as articulated in the letters of comment.

  
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Shane DeForest, Field Manager  
Pinedale Field Office

6-17-11  
Date

This decision is subject to administrative review under BLM regulation in accordance with 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 3165.3. Any request for administrative review of this decision must include the information required under 43 CFR 3165.3(b), including all supporting documentation. Such a request must be filed in writing with the State Director (920), Bureau of Land Management, P.O. Box 1828, Cheyenne, Wyoming 82003, within 20 business days of the date such notice of decision was received or considered to have been received. This decision will be considered to have been received seven (7) business days from the date it is mailed. This decision shall take effect immediately upon the date it is signed and shall remain in effect while any appeal is pending unless the State Director or the Interior Board of Land Appeals issues a stay.

The decision of the State Director may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR 3165.4.