

Dated: August 30, 2001.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**Bureau of Land Management**

[WY-920-1320-EL; WYW150210, WYW150318, WYW151134, WYW151643, & WYW154001]

**Federal Coal, Environmental Impact Statement and Notice of Scoping**

**AGENCY:** Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

**ACTION:** Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement on four maintenance lease applications received for five Federal coal tracts in the decertified Powder River Federal Coal Production Region, Wyoming, and Notice of Scoping.

**SUMMARY:** The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has received the

following competitive coal lease applications:

1. On March 10, 2000, Powder River Coal Company applied for a maintenance coal lease for approximately 4,500 acres (approximately 564 million recoverable tons of coal) in two tracts adjacent to the North Antelope/Rochelle Mine Complex in Campbell County, WY. The tracts, which are referred to as the NARO North Lease by Application (LBA) Tract and the NARO South LBA Tract, were assigned case numbers WYW150210 and WYW154001, respectively.

2. On March 23, 2000, Ark Land Company applied for a maintenance coal lease for approximately 2,799.5 acres (approximately 383.6 million in-place tons of coal) adjacent to the Black Thunder Mine in Campbell County, WY. The tract, which is referred to as the Little Thunder LBA Tract, was assigned case number WYW150318. On June 14, 2001, Ark Land Company filed an application to modify the Little Thunder LBA Tract. As currently filed, the tract includes approximately 3,449.317 acres and 440 million tons of recoverable coal reserves.

3. On July 28, 2000, Triton Coal Company applied for a maintenance coal lease for approximately 1,868 acres (approximately 173.2 million in-place tons of coal) adjacent to the North Rochelle Mine in Campbell County, WY. The tract, which is referred to as the West Roundup LBA Tract, was assigned case number WYW151134.

4. On September 12, 2000, Antelope Coal Company applied for a maintenance coal lease for approximately 3,500 acres (approximately 292.5 million in-place tons of coal) adjacent to the Antelope Mine in Campbell and Converse Counties, WY. The tract, which is referred to as the West Antelope LBA Tract, was assigned case number WYW151643. On June 27, 2001, Antelope Coal Company filed an application to modify the West Antelope LBA Tract. As currently filed, the tract includes approximately 3,542 acres and 293.9 million tons of in place coal reserves.

The tracts were applied for as maintenance tract LBAs under the provisions of 43 CFR 3425.1. The Powder River Regional Coal Team (RCT) reviewed these lease applications at a public meeting held on October 25, 2000, in Cheyenne, WY. The RCT recommended that BLM process these four lease applications. As part of the LBA process, BLM will prepare an environmental analysis in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA),

develop possible stipulations regarding mining operations, determine the fair market value (FMV) of the Federal coal included in each tract, and evaluate maximum economic recovery (MER) of the coal in each proposed tract.

BLM has determined that the requirements of NEPA would be best served by preparing one environmental impact statement (EIS) for these four lease applications, which are part of a contiguous group of five mines located south and east of Wright, WY. The purpose of the public scoping period and public scoping meeting is to allow interested parties to submit comments and/or relevant information that BLM should consider in preparing a draft EIS and in evaluating the FMV and MER of the Federal coal included in these four coal lease applications in the Wyoming Powder River Basin.

**DATES:** Scoping comments should be submitted by October 31, 2001, in order to be fully considered in the draft EIS. A public scoping meeting is scheduled to be held at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, October 10, 2001, at the Clarion Western Plaza Motel, 2009 S. Douglas Highway, Gillette, WY.

If you have concerns or issues that you believe the BLM should address in processing this exchange proposal, you can express them verbally at the scoping meetings; or you can mail, e-mail or fax written comments to BLM at the addresses given below by October 31, 2001.

**ADDRESSES:** Please address questions, comments or concerns to the BLM Casper Field Office, Attn: Nancy Doelger, 2987 Prospector Drive, Casper, WY 82604, fax them to 307-261-7587, or send e-mail comments to the attention of Nancy Doelger at [casper\\_wymail@blm.gov](mailto:casper_wymail@blm.gov).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Nancy Doelger or Mike Karbs at the above address, or phone: 307-261-7600.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** On March 10, 2000, Powder River Coal Company filed a coal lease application for the following lands in two tracts adjacent to the North Antelope/Rochelle Mine Complex in Campbell County, WY:

**NARO North—WYW150210**

T. 42 N., R. 70 W., 6th PM, Wyoming

Section 28: Lots 5-16;

Section 29: Lots 5-16;

Section 30: Lots 9-20;

T. 42 N., R. 71 W., 6th PM, Wyoming

Section 25: Lots 5-15;

Section 26: Lots 7-10;

Section 35: Lots 1, 2, 7-10, 15, 16.

Containing 2,369.38 acres, more or less.

**NARO South—WYW 154001**

T. 41 N., R. 70 W., 6th PM, Wyoming

Section 19: Lots 6-11, 12(S<sup>1/2</sup>), 13-20;

Section 20: Lots 5(S<sup>1/2</sup>), 6(S<sup>1/2</sup>), 7(S<sup>1/2</sup>), 8(S<sup>1/2</sup>), 9-16;

Section 21: Lots 5(S<sup>1/2</sup>), 12,13;

Section 28: Lots 3-6, 11, NE<sup>1/4</sup> SW<sup>1/4</sup>;

Section 29: Lots 1-12;

Section 30: Lots 5-12.

Containing 2,133.635 acres, more or less.

The tracts as applied for include an estimated 564 million tons of recoverable coal. According to the application filed for the NARO North and NARO South LBA Tracts, mining the coal included in these maintenance tracts would extend the life of the North Antelope/Rochelle Mine Complex.

On March 23, 2000, Ark Land Company filed a coal lease application for lands adjacent to the Black Thunder Mine in Campbell County, WY. The following lands are included in the tract as currently filed:

**Little Thunder—WYW150318**

T. 43 N., R. 71 W., 6th PM, Wyoming

Section 2: Lots 5, 6, 11-14, 19, 20;

Section 11: Lots 1, 2, 7-10, 15, 16;

Section 12: Lots 2 (W<sup>1/2</sup> and SE<sup>1/4</sup>), 3-16;

Section 13: Lots 1-16;

Section 14: Lots 1, 2, 6-9, 14, 15;

Section 24: Lots 1-16;

Section 25: Lots 1, 2, 7-10, 15, 16;

T. 44 N., R. 71 W., 6th PM, Wyoming

Section 35: Lots 1, 2, 7-10, 15, 16.

Containing 3,449.317 acres more or less.

The tract includes an estimated 440 million tons of in-place coal. According to the application, the coal is needed to maintain existing mining operations at the Black Thunder Mine and would be used for electric power generation.

On July 28, 2000, Triton Coal Company, LLC filed a coal lease application for the following lands adjacent to the North Rochelle Mine in Campbell County, WY:

**West Roundup—WYW151134**

T. 42 N., R. 70 W., 6th PM, Wyoming

Section 6: Lots 8-23;

Section 7: Lots 5-14;

Section 8: Lots 1-12;

Section 9: Lots 11,12,14;

T. 43 N., R. 70 W., 6th PM, Wyoming

Section 31: Lots 13-20;

T. 42 N., R. 71 W., 6th PM, Wyoming

Section 1: Lots 5,6,11-13.

Containing 1,868.120 acres more or less.

The tract includes an estimated 173.2 million tons of in-place coal.

On September 12, 2000, Antelope Coal Company filed a coal lease application for lands adjacent to the Antelope Mine in Campbell and Converse Counties, WY. The following lands are included in the tract as currently filed:

**West Antelope—WYW151643**

T. 40 N., R. 71 W., 6th PM, Wyoming

Section 3: Lots 15-18;

Section 4: Lots 5-20;

Section 5: Lots 5-7, 10-15, 19, 20;

Section 9: Lot 1;

Section 10: Lots 3, 4;

T. 41 N., R. 71 W., 6th PM, Wyoming

Section 28: Lots 1-16;

Section 29: Lots 1-16;

Section 32: Lots 1-3, 6-11, 14-16;

Section 33: Lots 1-16.

Containing 3,542.19 acres more or less.

The West Antelope tract includes an estimated 293.9 million tons of in-place coal. According to the application, mining this coal would extend the life of the existing mine and the coal would be mined for sale to electrical power generating plants.

As part of the coal leasing process, BLM will evaluate the tract configurations for each of these tracts and may decide to add or subtract Federal coal to avoid bypassing coal or to increase estimated FMV.

Each of the mines adjacent to the applied for LBA tracts (North Antelope/Rochelle Mine Complex, Black Thunder Mine, North Rochelle Mine, and Antelope Mine), has an approved mining and reclamation plan from the Land Quality Division of the Wyoming DEQ and an approved air quality permit from the Air Quality Division of the Wyoming DEQ. Each mine has previously acquired maintenance coal leases using the LBA process.

The U.S. Forest Service (FS) will be a cooperating agency in the preparation of the EIS because the surface of some of the land included for consideration for leasing is owned by the Federal government and administered by the FS as part of the Thunder Basin National Grasslands.

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) will be a cooperating agency in the preparation of the EIS. If the tracts are leased as maintenance tracts, each new lease must be incorporated into the existing mining and reclamation plan for the adjacent mine and the Secretary of the Interior must approve the revision to the Mineral Leasing Act (MLA) mining plan before the Federal coal in each tract can be mined. OSM is the Federal agency that would be responsible for recommending approval, approval with conditions, or disapproval of the revised MLA mining plans to the office of the Secretary of the Interior if any or all of these tracts are leased.

Several issues have been raised during processing previous applications to lease Federal coal in the Wyoming Powder River Basin. These include:

1. The need for resolution of conflicts between existing and proposed oil and

gas development, including coal bed methane, and coal mining on the tracts proposed for leasing;

2. Potential impacts to big game herds and hunting;

3. Potential impacts to sage grouse;

4. Potential impacts to Threatened and Endangered species;

5. The need for considering the cumulative impacts of leasing decisions combined with other existing and proposed development in the Wyoming Powder River Basin;

6. Potential health impacts related to blasting; and

7. The potential impacts on air and water quality.

If you have specific concerns about these issues, or have other concerns or issues that BLM should consider in processing this application, please express them at the public meeting or address them in writing to the above address. Written comments should be received by October 31, 2001, in order to be fully considered in the draft EIS.

Comments, including names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the address listed above during regular business hours (7:45 a.m.–4:30 p.m.), Monday through Friday, except holidays. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or street address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

Dated: August 29, 2001.

**Donald E. Shepard,**

*Acting Deputy State Director, Minerals and Lands.*

[FR Doc. 01–24661 Filed 10–2–01; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310–22–P

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]