

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Bureau of Land Management
Rock Springs Field Office

Bridger Coal Lease Modification to WYW154595

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: WYW154595

EA Number: WY-040-EA12-19

Location of Proposed Action: Approximately 35 miles northeast of Rock Springs, Sweetwater County, Wyoming. Section 34, Township 22 North, Range 101 West.

Applicant: Bridger Coal Company
c/o Interwest Mining Company
1407 West North Temple, Suite 310
Salt Lake City, Utah 84116

BACKGROUND

The Jim Bridger Coal Mine complex, located in southwestern Wyoming approximately 35 miles northeast of Rock Springs, is operated by Bridger Coal Company (BCC) and consists of a multi-faceted mining operation inclusive of surface, underground, and highwall mining methods together with ongoing reclamation operations. The Jim Bridger Coal Mine complex has been in production since 1974 providing coal to the adjacent Jim Bridger Power Plant. The annual production of this mine complex is approximately 6 million tons. The coal produced by underground mining methods replaces coal previously produced by surface mining methods, with no resulting change in annual coal production. Efforts to reclaim lands previously mined for surface coal can be increased as a result of shifting from surface mining to underground mining, which in fact is being done at the Bridger Coal mining operations.

The BCC filed an application on July 22, 2011 to modify federal coal lease WYW154595 to include 320.36 acres of unleased contiguous federal coal lands situated within Section 34, Township 22 North, Range 101 West. The federal coal reserves contained within this lease tract, estimated at approximately 5.7 million tons of mineable coal, would be mined, delivered and utilized for the generation of electricity. The BLM processed and evaluated the application under the following authorities: Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 as amended; Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960; National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 as amended; Federal Coal Leasing Amendments Act of 1976; Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976; and the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977.

Federal coal lease WYW154595 was originally issued to BCC on March 1, 2005. This lease modification would not displace other competitive commercial interests in the lands or deposits; would not include coal deposits that can be developed as a part of another potential or existing mining operation; and would be in the interest of the United States. This lease modification would not exceed the modified acreage limitation of 960 acres as set forth with the passage of the Energy Policy Act of 2005.

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Based upon the information contained in *Bridger Coal Lease Modification to WYW154595 Environmental Assessment* (WY-040-EA12-19) 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 Green River Resource Management Plan (GRRMP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement; (2) the Proposed Action is in conformance with the GRRMP; and (3) the Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement or a supplement to the existing environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

The Proposed Action has been designed to avoid or minimize environmental impacts to the extent feasible. The following mitigation measures have been identified for the proposed action:

- The potential adverse effects to the two cultural sites would be mitigated through an amendment to the existing Memorandum of Agreement between the Bureau of Land Management, State Historic Preservation Office, Office of Surface Mining, Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, and Bridger Coal Company regarding effects to historic properties for the current Jim Bridger underground coal mine.
- Short-term control of surface runoff, if needed, would be accomplished by implementation of alternate sediment control measures required by the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality-Land Quality Division and as described in the mine plan. Long-term control of surface runoff would be accomplished by successful implementation of the reclamation plan in the associated mine plan.

Additionally, the lessee would be required to comply with the BLM standard coal lease stipulations (refer to Section 4.4 of the EA).

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's 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.

Context

The proposed tract borders coal mining activity on three sides: to the east is the Bridger Underground Mine, on the north and south the lands are leased to BCC for the purpose of underground coal mining. To the west there are no further underground mineable coal reserves. The proposed lease modification would support future expansion on the western side of the underground mine. This federal coal is located within the checkerboard land pattern and rights to mine coal from adjacent private lands have already been secured by BCC. The modification of the existing federal coal lease would ensure that all of the potentially mineable coal can be reached. The inclusion of this lease modification tract into the existing Jim Bridger underground coal mine operation would provide for efficient mining and is the only economical and technologically feasible means of recovering these federal coal reserves. If the federal resource

under consideration for lease is not mined in conjunction with the intervening private coal, it would likely be bypassed.

The proposed lease modification tract is adjacent to current operations. The existing mine infrastructure provides an economical and technological mechanism of mining these coal resources. Mining of the approximately 5.7 million tons of mineable coal in the lease modification area is anticipated to add up to approximately one year of reserves to the existing operation, depending upon power plant fueling requirements. The coal produced by underground mining methods replaces coal previously produced by surface mining methods, with no resulting change in annual coal production.

Intensity

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Section 4 of the EA identifies the impacts that would likely occur. Impacts of this lease modification would not be significant and the coal lease stipulations and modification of the existing cultural Memorandum of Agreement would alleviate potential impacts. Benefits of the project would include continuation of employment for mine workers for approximately 1 year; royalties to Wyoming and the Federal government; and contribution of coal to meet the region's energy needs.

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

There are no public health or safety issues anticipated from the implementation of the proposed action.

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.

With the exception of two known cultural sites, no lands with unique characteristics exist within the proposed project area. The potential adverse effects to the two cultural sites would be mitigated through an amendment to the existing Memorandum of Agreement between the Bureau of Land Management, State Historic Preservation Office, Office of Surface Mining, Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, and Bridger Coal Company regarding effects to historic properties for the current Jim Bridger underground coal mine.

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

The extent and degree of impacts on the human environment for this lease modification would not be significant; these impacts are discussed in Section 4 of the EA. Coal leasing decisions have been made in this area by the BLM for many years. There is some uncertainty about the long-term cumulative effects of greenhouse gasses (GHG); how these effects can be managed cannot be quantified or predicted at this time. No expert scientific evidence indicating that the project would have significant effects has been located. The potential intensity of effects on the quality of the human environment is minimal. Preparation of an environmental impact statement is not warranted.

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

Possible effects to the human environment are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks. The project is not unique or unusual in this area. Coal mining has been ongoing in the area for decades. There are no predicted potential effects to the human environment that are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

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.

This decision would not establish a precedent. The Proposed Action was considered in the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. This decision is not unusual and significant cumulative effects are not predicted. This decision does not entail any known issues or elements that would create a precedent for future mining decisions. The decision does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

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

The Proposed Action was considered in the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Consistent with current permitting, the coal that would be mined as a result of this proposed modification would be expected to contribute approximately 6.25 million metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) as a result of burning and producing electric power at the Bridger Power Plant. The Proposed Action is not likely to change the level of air quality emissions from Jim Bridger Power Plant because other, although possibly more costly, coal sources could be utilized by the plant. Changes in emission levels from the power plant are more likely to occur in response to changes in emissions regulations. Therefore implementing the Proposed Action is not expected to add to GHG emissions and would not be expected to have a measureable contribution to global climate change.

Regardless of emission estimates, predicting the degree of impact of any single emitter of GHGs may have on global climate change, or on the changes to biotic and abiotic systems that accompany climate change, is not possible at this time. As such, debate about to what extent GHG emissions resulting from continued mining may contribute to global climate change, as well as the accompanying changes to natural systems, cannot be quantified or predicted. The degree to which any observable changes can, or would be, attributed to the Proposed Action cannot be reasonably predicted at this time.

The lands in proximity to the coal lease modification are managed for multiple uses or are privately held lands. Minimal individual effects and minimal cumulative effects are expected when added to the existing situation and other potential activities.

8. The degree to which the action may 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 potential adverse effects to the two cultural sites would be mitigated through an amendment to the existing Memorandum of Agreement between the Bureau of Land Management, State Historic Preservation Office, Office of Surface Mining, Wyoming Department of Environmental

Quality, and Bridger Coal Company regarding effects to historic properties for the current Jim Bridger underground coal mine.

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.

The proposed action was analyzed for impacts to Threatened, Endangered and sensitive species. No concerns were identified. Consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service is not recommended.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The proposed action is consistent with all Federal, State, and local laws.

Authorized Official: _____

Lance Porter
Field Manager
Rock Springs Field Office

_____ Date