

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

**OCI Wyoming Lease Modification to WYW079420**

**Lease/Serial/Case File No.:** WYW079420

**EA Number:** WYW-040-EA14-80

**Location of Proposed Action:** Approximately 15 miles northwest of Green River, Sweetwater County, Wyoming, Section 34, Township 20 North, Range 109 West.

**Applicant:** OCI Wyoming L.P.  
P.O. Box 513  
Green River, Wyoming 82935

**BACKGROUND**

OCI Wyoming L.P. (OCI) owns and operates the Big Island Mine complex located north of Interstate 80, approximately 15 miles northwest of Green River, Wyoming in Sweetwater County. OCI's Big Island Mine complex has been in operation since 1962 and consists of an underground trona mine and associated soda ash refinery. The OCI refinery purifies the trona ore into soda ash. Soda ash is an essential raw material in glass making, chemicals, detergents, and other industrial products. OCI sells the soda ash domestically and internationally. The mining process involves two trona seams, Bed 24 and Bed 25, nominally at 800 feet and 850 feet deep. The annual trona production for this operation is approximately 3.5 million tons. Future planned expansion may increase mine production to the 4 to 5 million tons per year range. The underground mining operation uses continuous miners (automated mining equipment) mining in a modified room and pillar method employing a no surface subsidence mine design due to its proximity to the Green River. During the 50-year life of the property, no surface subsidence has been measured. Future mining will continue to maintain a no subsidence mine design.

OCI filed an application on July 25, 2012 to modify federal sodium lease WYW079420 to include 640 acres of unleased contiguous federal sodium lands situated within Section 34, Township 20 North, Range 109 West. The federal sodium reserves contained within this lease tract, estimated at approximately 21 million tons of mineable trona, would be mined and converted to soda ash for domestic and international markets. The BLM processed and evaluated the application under the following authorities: Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 as amended; Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976, and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), its implementing regulations found in Title 40 CFR Part 1500–1508, BLM's National Environmental Policy Act Handbook (H-1790-1) (BLM 1988), BLM's desktop reference, Overview of BLM's NEPA Process (BLM 1996a), and Considering Cumulative Impacts Under the National Environmental Policy Act (Council on Environmental Quality [CEQ] 1997).

Federal sodium lease WYW079420 was originally issued to Stauffer Chemical Co. on October

31, 1961 and is currently held by OCI Wyoming L.P. operating the Big Island Mine. This lease modification would not displace other competitive commercial interests in the lands or deposits; would not include sodium 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 aggregate acreage limitation of 30,720 acres in any one state or 2,560 acres for any one lease as set forth in the Mineral Leasing Act as amended.

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Based upon the information contained in *OCI Wyoming LP Lease Modification to WYW079420 Environmental Assessment* (WYW-040-EA14-80) 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.

No mitigation measures were found to be necessary.

Additionally, the lessee would be required to comply with the BLM standard sodium lease stipulations (refer to Section 4.3 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.

### **Context**

The proposed tract borders active sodium leases on three sides and is adjacent to OCI's existing federal sodium lease WYW079420. The Big Island Mine is the only operation that has access to and is currently mining Bed 24 and Bed 25. OCI's lease areas encompass the bulk of these two trona beds.

The modification of the existing lease would provide access to the lands applied-for to allow for the development of the sodium mineral resource. This lease modification tract, together with the adjacent leased tracts, forms a contiguous logical reserve block and provides for efficient mining from the existing Big Island Mine workings. The inclusion of this lease modification tract into the existing Big Island mine operation is the most economical and technologically feasible means of recovering these federal sodium reserves. If the federal resource under consideration for lease is not mined in conjunction with the intervening private sodium, it would likely be bypassed. Modification of the existing federal sodium lease would ensure that all of the potentially mineable sodium resource can be reached.

The proposed lease modification tract is adjacent to current operations. The existing mine and refinery infrastructure provides an economical and technological mechanism of mining these sodium resources. Mining of the approximately 21million tons of mineable trona in the lease modification area is anticipated to add up to approximately 4 years of reserves to the existing operation, depending upon the operations annual soda ash production and sales.

## **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. Benefits of the project would include continuation of employment for mine workers for approximately 4 years and continued royalties to Wyoming and the Federal government. The sodium (trona) resource would not be available for future recovery.

### ***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.***

No historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas will be affected as a result of this project. Section 34 would be mined by underground mining methods which have no resultant surface subsidence and therefore no effect on any surface geographical areas, known, or unknown.

### ***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 controversial. Sodium leasing decisions have been made in this area by the BLM for many years and are covered in the GRRMP Final EIS (1997 GRRMP).

### ***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. Trona mining has been ongoing in the area for decades.

### ***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.**

It is not anticipated that approval of this proposal will create any cumulative effects in conjunction with any other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects.

The OCI Big Island Mine has been operating since 1962 adjacent to the project area. Cumulative and residual effects from the 640 acres of federal sodium lease modification in Section 34 would not be greater than those identified and analyzed in the GRRMP Final EIS (1997 GRRMP).

**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.**

No sites, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places nor any significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources will be affected as a result of this project. Section 34 would be mined by underground mining methods that have no resultant surface subsidence and therefore no effect on any surface structures, objects or resources, known, or unknown.

**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.**

It was determined through internal and external scoping that there was no potential for this action to adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

**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:

Kimberlee D. Foster  
Kimberlee Foster  
Field Manager  
Rock Springs Field Office

10/17/14  
Date