

under the Cortez Hills Expansion Project would be processed at the existing Pipeline and/or Cortez mills. The proposed Project would expand existing tailings facilities at both the Pipeline and Cortez complexes. A lesser quantity of refractory ore would be sold to an off-site processing facility. The primary method of processing low-grade ore would be heap leaching.

The DEIS addresses concerns identified by the BLM and other agencies, as well as comments raised during the public scoping period in 2005. Issues analyzed in the DEIS include: Air quality, cultural resources, water quality, environmental justice, floodplains, hazardous materials and solid waste, invasive, and/or non-native species, migratory birds, Native American religious concerns, special status species, wetlands and riparian zones, and wilderness characteristics. Construction and operation of the proposed Cortez Hills Expansion Project is projected to begin in 2008. The life of the mine would include approximately 10 years of active mining and concurrent reclamation as areas become available, as well as an additional three years for ongoing ore processing, final reclamation, and closure.

A range of alternatives (including alternate waste rock facility and heap leach pad locations, underground mining only, and the No Action Alternative) has been developed and analyzed to address the concerns and issues that were identified. Other alternatives under consideration and the rationale for their elimination from detailed analysis also are discussed. Mitigation measures have been identified to minimize potential environmental impacts and to assure that the proposed Project would not result in undue or unnecessary degradation of public lands. In addition, the DEIS includes an analysis of cumulative impacts, including a comprehensive evaluation of potential impacts to Native American religious concerns.

Dated: August 20, 2007.

**Gerald M. Smith,**

*Battle Mountain Field Office Manager.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Bureau of Land Management

[UT-070-1610-DP-010J]

#### Notice of Availability of the Supplement to the Vernal Field Office Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Non-Wilderness Study Area (WSA) Lands With Wilderness Characteristics

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

**ACTION:** Notice of Availability.

**SUMMARY:** In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4321, *et seq.*) and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA, 43 U.S.C. 1701, *et seq.*), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared the Supplement to the Vernal Field Office DRMP/DEIS to augment the identification and analysis of managing non-WSA lands with wilderness characteristics.

**DATES:** The 90-day public comment period will begin on the date the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) publishes its Notice of Availability (NOA) in the **Federal Register**. To assure that public comments will be considered, the BLM must receive written comments on the Supplement to the Vernal Field Office DRMP/DEIS on or before the end of the comment period at the address listed below.

**Comments:** Comments and information submitted on the Supplement to the Vernal Field Office DRMP/DEIS, including names, e-mail addresses, and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review and disclosure at the Vernal Field Office address listed below. The BLM will not accept anonymous comments. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Comments may be submitted by any of the following methods:

- **Mail:** Bureau of Land Management, Vernal Field Office, 170 South 500 East, Vernal, UT 84078.

- **E-mail:**  
[UT\\_Vernal\\_Comments@blm.gov](mailto:UT_Vernal_Comments@blm.gov).

- **Fax:** (435) 781-4480.

#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Kelly Buckner, RMP Project Manager, Bureau of Land Management, Vernal Field Office, 170 South 500 East, Vernal, UT 84078; telephone (435) 781-4400; e-mail [Kelly.Buckner@blm.gov](mailto:Kelly.Buckner@blm.gov). Copies of the Supplement to the Vernal Field Office DRMP/DEIS are available in the Vernal Field Office and on the Internet at <http://www.blm.gov/ut/st/en/fo/vernal.html>.

**Background Information:** The planning area includes approximately 1.8 million acres of BLM administered surface lands and 2.1 million acres of federal mineral estate under federal, state, private, and Ute Tribal surface in Duchesne, and Uintah Counties in northeast Utah, and about 3,000 acres in Grand County. The planning area encompasses public lands currently managed under the Book Cliffs and Diamond Mountain RMPs. The decisions of the DRMP/DEIS will only apply to BLM-administered public lands and federal mineral estate. The Vernal Field Office prepared the DRMP/DEIS to reevaluate, with public involvement, existing conditions, resources and uses, and consider the mix of resource allocations and management decisions designed to balance uses and protection of resources pursuant to FLPMA and other applicable laws. The DRMP/DEIS was released for public review January 14, 2005.

Pursuant to FLPMA Sections 201 and 202 (43 U.S.C. 1711, 1712) and the BLM's land use planning handbook (Manual Handbook H-1601-1), BLM has authority to evaluate and manage non-WSA lands with wilderness characteristics through land use planning. These characteristics include the appearance of naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude, and outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation. The applicable law requires that the BLM consider these lands and resource values in planning, including prescribing measures to manage for their wilderness characteristics. Accordingly, during the planning process, the Vernal Field Office found 25 areas (totaling 277,596 acres), outside of existing WSAs that have wilderness characteristics.

The DRMP/DEIS analyzed five alternatives for the management of public lands in the Vernal Field Office and disclosed the impacts of implementing each alternative to the human environment. To ensure that (1) adequate consideration is given to non-WSA lands with wilderness characteristics, (2) an adequate range of alternatives is considered for these

lands, and (3) an adequate analysis is prepared from which to base land use decisions, the Supplement to the Vernal Field Office DRMP/DEIS will prescribe specific actions to manage for the wilderness characteristics of non-WSA lands with wilderness characteristics in a new alternative.

Dated: September 18, 2007.

**Selma Sierra,**

*Utah State Director.*

[FR Doc. E7-19706 Filed 10-4-07; 8:45 am]

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Bureau of Land Management

[UTU-080-2007-9141-EJ]

#### Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and To Conduct Public Scoping for the Natural Buttes Area Gas Development Project, Uintah County, UT

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

**ACTION:** Notice of Intent (NOI).

**SUMMARY:** Pursuant to Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Vernal Field Office, Vernal, Utah, will prepare an EIS on the impacts of efficient and orderly development of the natural gas resources of the Greater Natural Buttes Field area. This notice announces the public scoping period.

**DATES:** A public scoping period of 30 days will commence on the date this notice is published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the **Federal Register**. Comments on issues, potential impacts, or suggestions for alternatives can be submitted in writing to the address listed below within 30 days of the date this Notice is published. A public meeting will be conducted during the scoping period in Vernal. The date, place, and time will be announced through the local news media and the BLM Web site <http://www.blm.gov/utah/vernal/nepa.html> at least 15 days prior to the meeting.

**ADDRESSES:** Comments may be submitted by any of the following methods:

- *Mail:* Bureau of Land Management, Vernal Field Office, 170 South 500 East, Vernal, Utah 84078.

- *E-mail:*

[UT\\_Vernal\\_Comments@blm.gov](mailto:UT_Vernal_Comments@blm.gov).

- *Fax:* (435) 781-4410.

Please reference the Greater Natural Buttes Area when submitting your comments. Comments and information

submitted, including names, e-mail addresses, and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the address listed above. The BLM will not accept anonymous comments. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. All submissions from organizations and businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be available for public inspection in their entirety.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**

Stephanie Howard, Project Manager, BLM Vernal Field Office, 170 South 500 East, Vernal, UT 84078. Ms. Howard may also be reached at 435-781-4400.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** This document provides notice that the BLM, Vernal Field Office, Vernal, UT, intends to prepare an EIS, and announces the public scoping period. The purpose of the public scoping process is to determine relevant issues that will influence the scope of the environmental analysis and EIS alternatives. You may submit comments in writing to the BLM at the public scoping meeting, or you may submit them to the BLM using one of the methods listed in the **ADDRESSES** section above. The public is encouraged to participate during the scoping process to help identify issues of concern related to the proposed action, determine the depth of the analysis needed for issues addressed in the EIS, identify potential mitigation measures, and identify reasonable alternatives to be evaluated in the EIS.

*Proposed Project Description:* The EIS will encompass 162,911 acres in Townships 8 through 11 South, Ranges 20 through 24 East (Salt Lake Meridian) in Uintah County, Utah. The project is located on lands administered by the BLM (88,565 acres), Northern Ute Tribe as administered by the BIA (39,399 acres), the State of Utah (32,755 acres), and private interests (2,192 acres). Mineral interests are owned by the BLM (79 percent), the State of Utah (20 percent), and private interests (one percent). The Natural Buttes gas field was discovered in the 1950s and has produced around 1.0 trillion cubic feet

of natural gas and 5.0 million barrels of crude oil and condensate and is among the top 15 gas fields in the United States in terms of natural gas reserves. As of August 2006, the Greater Natural Buttes Area contained approximately 1,077 producing gas wells and 20 oil wells.

Kerr-McGee Oil & Gas Onshore LP (KMG) a wholly-owned subsidiary of Anadarko Petroleum Corporation proposes to conduct infill drilling to develop the hydrocarbon resources from oil and gas leases within the Greater Natural Buttes Project Area in Uintah County, Utah. KMG's intent is to explore and develop potentially productive subsurface formations underlying the land in the Greater Natural Buttes Project Area. Although actual operations are subject to change as the project proceeds, KMG's plan is to drill 3,496 additional wells over a period of 10 years. It is assumed that up to 179 new wells would be drilled by other operators having leasehold rights in the project area. The productive life of each well is estimated to be approximately 30 to 50 years.

Infill drilling would be performed on 40-acre and 20-acre surface spacing throughout the project area, i.e., with 16 to 32 surface well pads per section. KMG defines a 40-acre well pad as the first well pad located in a governmental 40-acre quarter-quarter section. A 20-acre pad is defined as the second well pad located in a 40-acre quarter-quarter section. Well spacing in the subsurface would be based on the KMG's reservoir engineering evaluation on an on-going basis and will be site-dependent, potentially ranging from 16 wells per section (40-acre spacing) to 64 wells per section (10-acre spacing) or more.

Project development would utilize existing roads and, when necessary, new roads would be constructed. Equipment required by most wells includes a gas gathering line, a separator, gas meter, produced water and liquid hydrocarbon storage tanks, and chemical tanks. Gas would be transported via pipeline to centralized compression and treatment facilities. Produced water would be transported by truck or pipeline to the KMG-operated produced water disposal wells or to KMG-owned or commercially owned evaporation ponds or disposal wells. To minimize new disturbance, KMG would utilize the existing ancillary facility infrastructure within the project area, where possible, including gas compression facilities, power lines, water disposal and treatment facilities, and gas gathering pipelines. Total surface disturbance for the proposed project is estimated to be