

SUBCHAPTER F—AREAS UNSUITABLE FOR MINING

PART 761—AREAS DESIGNATED BY ACT OF CONGRESS

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AUTHORITY: 30 U.S.C. 1201 *et seq.*

SOURCE: 48 FR 41348, Sept. 14, 1983, unless otherwise noted.

§ 761.1 Scope.

This part establishes the procedures and standards to be followed in determining whether a proposed surface coal mining and reclamation operation can be authorized in light of the prohibitions and limitations in section 522(e) of the Act for those types of operations on certain Federal, public and private lands.

§ 761.3 Authority.

The State regulatory authority or the Secretary is authorized by section 522(e) of the Act (30 U.S.C. 1272(e)) to prohibit or limit surface coal mining operations on or near certain private, Federal, and other public lands, subject to valid existing rights and except for those operations which existed on August 3, 1977.

§ 761.5 Definitions.

For the purposes of this part—

Cemetery means any area of land where human bodies are interred.

Community or institutional building means any structure, other than a public building or an occupied dwelling, which is used primarily for meetings, gatherings or functions of local civic organizations or other community groups; functions as an educational, cultural, historic, religious, scientific, correctional, mental-health or physical health care facility; or is used for public services, including, but not limited to, water supply, power generation or sewage treatment.

Occupied dwelling means any building that is currently being used on a regular or temporary basis for human habitation.

Public building means any structure that is owned or leased, and principally used by a governmental agency for public business or meetings.

Public park means an area or portion of an area dedicated or designated by any Federal, State, or local agency primarily for public recreational use, whether or not such use is limited to certain times or days, including any land leased, reserved, or held open to the public because of that use.

Public road means a road (a) which has been designated as a public road pursuant to the laws of the jurisdiction in which it is located; (b) which is maintained with public funds in a manner similar to other public roads of the same classification within the jurisdiction; (c) for which there is substantial (more than incidental) public use; and (d) which meets road construction standards for other public roads of the same classification in the local jurisdiction.

Publicly-owned park means a public park that is owned by a Federal, State or local governmental entity.

Significant forest cover means an existing plant community consisting predominantly of trees and other woody vegetation. The Secretary of Agriculture shall decide on a case-by-case basis whether the forest cover is significant within those national forests west of the 100th meridian.

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Significant recreational, timber, economic, or other values incompatible with surface coal mining operations means those values to be evaluated for their significance which could be damaged by, and are not capable of existing together with, surface coal mining operations because of the undesirable effects mining would have on those values, either on the area included in the permit application or on other affected areas. Those values to be evaluated for their importance include:

(a) Recreation, including hiking, boating, camping, skiing or other related outdoor activities;

(b) Timber manager and silviculture;

(c) Agriculture, aquaculture or production of other natural, processed or manufactured products which enter commerce;

(d) Scenic, historic, archeologic, esthetic, fish, wildlife, plants or cultural interests.

Surface operations and impacts incident to an underground coal mine means all activities involved in or related to underground coal mining which are either conducted on the surface of the land, produce changes in the land surface or disturb the surface, air or water resources of the area, including all activities listed in section 701(28) of the Act and the definition of surface coal mining operations appearing in §700.5 of this chapter.

Valid existing rights means a set of circumstances under which a person may, subject to regulatory authority approval, conduct surface coal mining operations on lands where 30 U.S.C. 1272(e) and §761.11 would otherwise prohibit such operations. Possession of valid existing rights only confers an exception from the prohibitions of §761.11 and 30 U.S.C. 1272(e). A person seeking to exercise valid existing rights must comply with all other pertinent requirements of the Act and the applicable regulatory program.

(a) *Property rights demonstration*. Except as provided in paragraph (c) of this definition, a person claiming valid existing rights must demonstrate that a legally binding conveyance, lease, deed, contract, or other document vests that person, or a predecessor in interest, with the right to conduct the type of surface coal mining operations

intended. This right must exist at the time that the land came under the protection of §761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e). Applicable State statutory or case law will govern interpretation of documents relied upon to establish property rights, unless Federal law provides otherwise. If no applicable State law exists, custom and generally accepted usage at the time and place that the documents came into existence will govern their interpretation.

(b) Except as provided in paragraph (c) of this definition, a person claiming valid existing rights also must demonstrate compliance with one of the following standards:

(1) *Good faith/all permits standard*. All permits and other authorizations required to conduct surface coal mining operations had been obtained, or a good faith effort to obtain all necessary permits and authorizations had been made, before the land came under the protection of §761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e). At a minimum, an application must have been submitted for any permit required under subchapter G of this chapter or its State program counterpart.

(2) *Needed for and adjacent standard*. The land is needed for and immediately adjacent to a surface coal mining operation for which all permits and other authorizations required to conduct surface coal mining operations had been obtained, or a good faith attempt to obtain all permits and authorizations had been made, before the land came under the protection of §761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e). To meet this standard, a person must demonstrate that prohibiting expansion of the operation onto that land would unfairly impact the viability of the operation as originally planned before the land came under the protection of §761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e). Except for operations in existence before August 3, 1977, or for which a good faith effort to obtain all necessary permits had been made before August 3, 1977, this standard does not apply to lands already under the protection of §761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e) when the regulatory authority approved the permit for the original operation or when the good faith effort to obtain all necessary permits for the

original operation was made. In evaluating whether a person meets this standard, the agency making the determination may consider factors such as:

(i) The extent to which coal supply contracts or other legal and business commitments that predate the time that the land came under the protection of § 761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e) depend upon use of that land for surface coal mining operations.

(ii) The extent to which plans used to obtain financing for the operation before the land came under the protection of § 761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e) rely upon use of that land for surface coal mining operations.

(iii) The extent to which investments in the operation before the land came under the protection of § 761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e) rely upon use of that land for surface coal mining operations.

(iv) Whether the land lies within the area identified on the life-of-mine map submitted under § 779.24(c) or § 783.24(c) of this chapter before the land came under the protection of § 761.11.

(c) *Roads.* A person who claims valid existing rights to use or construct a road across the surface of lands protected by § 761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e) must demonstrate that one or more of the following circumstances exist if the road is included within the definition of "surface coal mining operations" in § 700.5 of this chapter:

(1) The road existed when the land upon which it is located came under the protection of § 761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e), and the person has a legal right to use the road for surface coal mining operations.

(2) A properly recorded right of way or easement for a road in that location existed when the land came under the protection of § 761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e), and, under the document creating the right of way or easement, and under subsequent conveyances, the person has a legal right to use or construct a road across the right of way or easement for surface coal mining operations.

(3) A valid permit for use or construction of a road in that location for surface coal mining operations existed when the land came under the protection of § 761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e).

(4) Valid existing rights exist under paragraphs (a) and (b) of this definition.

We, us, and our refer to the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement.

You and your refer to a person who claims or seeks to obtain an exception or waiver authorized by § 761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e).

[48 FR 41348, Sept. 14, 1983, as amended at 52 FR 4261, Feb. 10, 1987; 56 FR 65634, Dec. 17, 1991; 64 FR 70831, Dec. 17, 1999]

§ 761.10 Information collection.

(a) In accordance with 44 U.S.C. 3501 *et seq.*, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has approved the information collection requirements of this part. The OMB clearance number is 1029-0111. The regulatory authority or other responsible agency will use this information to determine whether a person has valid existing rights or qualifies for one of the other waivers or exemptions from the general prohibition on conducting surface coal mining operations in the areas listed in 30 U.S.C. 1272(e). Persons seeking to conduct surface coal mining operations on these lands must respond to obtain a benefit in accordance with 30 U.S.C. 1272(e).

(b) We estimate that the public reporting and recordkeeping burden for this part will average 15 hours per response under § 761.13, 0.5 hour per response under § 761.14, 2 hours per response under § 761.15, 14 hours per response under § 761.16, 2 hours per response under § 761.17(c), and 2 hours per response under § 761.17(d), including time spent reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. The burden for § 761.16 includes 6 hours for the person seeking the determination and 8 hours for the agency processing the request. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of these information collection and recordkeeping requirements, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, Information Collection Clearance Officer, 1951 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC

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20240; and the Office of Management and Budget, Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Attention: Interior Desk Officer, 725 17th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20503. Please refer to OMB Control Number 1029-0111 in any correspondence.

[64 FR 70832, Dec. 17, 1999]

§ 761.11 Areas where surface coal mining operations are prohibited or limited.

You may not conduct surface coal mining operations on the following lands unless you either have valid existing rights, as determined under § 761.16, or qualify for the exception for existing operations under § 761.12:

(a) Any lands within the boundaries of:

- (1) The National Park System;
- (2) The National Wildlife Refuge System;
- (3) The National System of Trails;
- (4) The National Wilderness Preservation System;
- (5) The Wild and Scenic Rivers System, including study rivers designated under section 5(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, 16 U.S.C. 1276(a), or study rivers or study river corridors established in any guidelines issued under that Act; or
- (6) National Recreation Areas designated by Act of Congress.

(b) Any Federal lands within a national forest. This prohibition does not apply if the Secretary finds that there are no significant recreational, timber, economic, or other values that may be incompatible with surface coal mining operations, and:

(1) Any surface operations and impacts will be incident to an underground coal mine; or

(2) With respect to lands that do not have significant forest cover within national forests west of the 100th meridian, the Secretary of Agriculture has determined that surface mining is in compliance with the Act, the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, 16 U.S.C. 528-531; the Federal Coal Leasing Amendments Act of 1975, 30 U.S.C. 181 *et seq.*; and the National Forest Management Act of 1976, 16 U.S.C. 1600 *et seq.* This provision does not apply to the Custer National Forest.

(c) Any lands where the operation would adversely affect any publicly owned park or any place in the National Register of Historic Places. This prohibition does not apply if, as provided in § 761.17(d), the regulatory authority and the Federal, State, or local agency with jurisdiction over the park or place jointly approve the operation.

(d) Within 100 feet, measured horizontally, of the outside right-of-way line of any public road. This prohibition does not apply:

(1) Where a mine access or haul road joins a public road, or

(2) When, as provided in § 761.14, the regulatory authority (or the appropriate public road authority designated by the regulatory authority) allows the public road to be relocated or closed, or the area within the protected zone to be affected by the surface coal mining operation, after:

(i) Providing public notice and opportunity for a public hearing; and

(ii) Finding in writing that the interests of the affected public and landowners will be protected.

(e) Within 300 feet, measured horizontally, of any occupied dwelling. This prohibition does not apply when:

(1) The owner of the dwelling has provided a written waiver consenting to surface coal mining operations within the protected zone, as provided in § 761.15; or

(2) The part of the operation to be located closer than 300 feet to the dwelling is an access or haul road that connects with an existing public road on the side of the public road opposite the dwelling.

(f) Within 300 feet, measured horizontally, of any public building, school, church, community or institutional building, or public park.

(g) Within 100 feet, measured horizontally, of a cemetery. This prohibition does not apply if the cemetery is relocated in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations.

[64 FR 70832, Dec. 17, 1999]

§ 761.12 Exception for existing operations.

The prohibitions and limitations of § 761.11 do not apply to:

(a) Surface coal mining operations for which a valid permit, issued under

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Subchapter G of this chapter or an approved State regulatory program, exists when the land comes under the protection of § 761.11. This exception applies only to lands within the permit area as it exists when the land comes under the protection of § 761.11.

(b) With respect to operations subject to Subchapter B of this chapter, lands upon which validly authorized surface coal mining operations exist when the land comes under the protection of 30 U.S.C. 1272(e) or § 761.11.

[64 FR 70833, Dec. 17, 1999]

§ 761.13 Procedures for compatibility findings for surface coal mining operations on Federal lands in national forests.

(a) If you intend to rely upon the exception provided in § 761.11(b) to conduct surface coal mining operations on Federal lands within a national forest, you must request that we obtain the Secretarial findings required by § 761.11(b).

(b) You may submit a request to us before preparing and submitting an application for a permit or boundary revision. If you do, you must explain how the proposed operation would not damage the values listed in the definition of "significant recreational, timber, economic, or other values incompatible with surface coal mining operations" in § 761.5. You must include a map and sufficient information about the nature of the proposed operation for the Secretary to make adequately documented findings. We may request that you provide any additional information that we determine is needed to make the required findings.

(c) When a proposed surface coal mining operation or proposed boundary revision for an existing surface coal mining operation includes Federal lands within a national forest, the regulatory authority may not issue the permit or approve the boundary revision before the Secretary makes the findings required by § 761.11(b).

[64 FR 70833, Dec. 17, 1999]

§ 761.14 Procedures for relocating or closing a public road or waiving the prohibition on surface coal mining operations within the buffer zone of a public road.

(a) This section does not apply to:

(1) Lands for which a person has valid existing rights, as determined under § 761.16.

(2) Lands within the scope of the exception for existing operations in § 761.12.

(3) Access or haul roads that join a public road, as described in § 761.11(d)(1).

(b) You must obtain any necessary approvals from the authority with jurisdiction over the road if you propose to:

(1) Relocate a public road;

(2) Close a public road; or

(3) Conduct surface coal mining operations within 100 feet, measured horizontally, of the outside right-of-way line of a public road.

(c) Before approving an action proposed under paragraph (b) of this section, the regulatory authority, or a public road authority that it designates, must determine that the interests of the public and affected landowners will be protected. Before making this determination, the authority must:

(1) Provide a public comment period and opportunity to request a public hearing in the locality of the proposed operation;

(2) If a public hearing is requested, publish appropriate advance notice at least two weeks before the hearing in a newspaper of general circulation in the affected locality; and

(3) Based upon information received from the public, make a written finding as to whether the interests of the public and affected landowners will be protected. If a hearing was held, the authority must make this finding within 30 days after the hearing. If no hearing was held, the authority must make this finding within 30 days after the end of the public comment period.

[64 FR 70833, Dec. 17, 1999]

§ 761.15 Procedures for waiving the prohibition on surface coal mining operations within the buffer zone of an occupied dwelling.

(a) This section does not apply to:

(1) Lands for which a person has valid existing rights, as determined under § 761.16.

(2) Lands within the scope of the exception for existing operations in § 761.12.

(3) Access or haul roads that connect with an existing public road on the side of the public road opposite the dwelling, as provided in § 761.11(e)(2).

(b) If you propose to conduct surface coal mining operations within 300 feet, measured horizontally, of any occupied dwelling, the permit application must include a written waiver by lease, deed, or other conveyance from the owner of the dwelling. The waiver must clarify that the owner and signator had the legal right to deny mining and knowingly waived that right. The waiver will act as consent to surface coal mining operations within a closer distance of the dwelling as specified.

(c) If you obtained a valid waiver before August 3, 1977, from the owner of

an occupied dwelling to conduct operations within 300 feet of the dwelling, you need not submit a new waiver.

(d) If you obtain a valid waiver from the owner of an occupied dwelling, that waiver will remain effective against subsequent purchasers who had actual or constructive knowledge of the existing waiver at the time of purchase. A subsequent purchaser will be deemed to have constructive knowledge if the waiver has been properly filed in public property records pursuant to State laws or if surface coal mining operations have entered the 300-foot zone before the date of purchase.

[64 FR 70833, Dec. 17, 1999]

§ 761.16 Submission and processing of requests for valid existing rights determinations.

(a) *Basic framework for valid existing rights determinations.* The following table identifies the agency responsible for making a valid existing rights determination and the definition that it must use, based upon which paragraph of § 761.11 applies and whether the request includes Federal lands.

Paragraph of § 761.11 that provides protection	Protected feature	Type of land to which request pertains	Agency responsible for determination	Applicable definition of valid existing rights
(a)	National parks, wildlife refuges, etc..	Federal	OSM	Federal ¹
(a)	National parks, wildlife refuges, etc..	Non-Federal	Regulatory authority	Federal ¹
(b)	Federal lands in national forests ³ .	Federal	OSM	Federal ¹
(c)	Public parks and historic places.	Does not matter	Regulatory authority	Regulatory program ²
(d)	Public roads	Does not matter	Regulatory authority	Regulatory program ²
(e)	Occupied dwellings	Does not matter	Regulatory authority	Regulatory program ²
(f)	Schools, churches, parks, etc..	Does not matter	Regulatory authority	Regulatory program ²
(g)	Cemeteries	Does not matter	Regulatory authority	Regulatory program ²

¹ Definition in 30 CFR 761.5.

² Definition in applicable State or Federal regulatory program under 30 CFR Chapter VII, Subchapter T.

³ Neither 30 U.S.C. 1272(e) nor 30 CFR 761.11 provides special protection for non-Federal lands within national forests. Therefore, this table does not include a category for those lands.

(b) *What you must submit as part of a request for a valid existing rights determination.* You must submit a request for a valid existing rights determination to the appropriate agency under paragraph (a) of this section if you intend to conduct surface coal mining operations on the basis of valid existing rights under § 761.11 or wish to confirm the right to do so. You may submit this request before preparing and submit-

ting an application for a permit or boundary revision for the land, unless the applicable regulatory program provides otherwise.

(1) *Requirements for property rights demonstration.* You must provide a property rights demonstration under paragraph (a) of the definition of valid existing rights in § 761.5 if your request relies upon the good faith/all permits standard or the needed for and adjacent

standard in paragraph (b) of the definition of valid existing rights in § 761.5. This demonstration must include the following items:

(i) A legal description of the land to which your request pertains.

(ii) Complete documentation of the character and extent of your current interests in the surface and mineral estates of the land to which your request pertains.

(iii) A complete chain of title for the surface and mineral estates of the land to which your request pertains.

(iv) A description of the nature and effect of each title instrument that forms the basis for your request, including any provision pertaining to the type or method of mining or mining-related surface disturbances and facilities.

(v) A description of the type and extent of surface coal mining operations that you claim the right to conduct, including the method of mining, any mining-related surface activities and facilities, and an explanation of how those operations would be consistent with State property law.

(vi) Complete documentation of the nature and ownership, as of the date that the land came under the protection of § 761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e), of all property rights for the surface and mineral estates of the land to which your request pertains.

(vii) Names and addresses of the current owners of the surface and mineral estates of the land to which your request pertains.

(viii) If the coal interests have been severed from other property interests, documentation that you have notified and provided reasonable opportunity for the owners of other property interests in the land to which your request pertains to comment on the validity of your property rights claims.

(ix) Any comments that you receive in response to the notification provided under paragraph (b)(1)(viii) of this section.

(2) *Requirements for good faith/all permits standard.* If your request relies upon the good faith/all permits standard in paragraph (b)(1) of the definition of valid existing rights in § 761.5, you must submit the information required under paragraph (b)(1) of this section.

You also must submit the following information about permits, licenses, and authorizations for surface coal mining operations on the land to which your request pertains:

(i) Approval and issuance dates and identification numbers for any permits, licenses, and authorizations that you or a predecessor in interest obtained before the land came under the protection of § 761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e).

(ii) Application dates and identification numbers for any permits, licenses, and authorizations for which you or a predecessor in interest submitted an application before the land came under the protection of § 761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e).

(iii) An explanation of any other good faith effort that you or a predecessor in interest made to obtain the necessary permits, licenses, and authorizations as of the date that the land came under the protection of § 761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e).

(3) *Requirements for needed for and adjacent standard.* If your request relies upon the needed for and adjacent standard in paragraph (b)(2) of the definition of valid existing rights in § 761.5, you must submit the information required under paragraph (b)(1) of this section. In addition, you must explain how and why the land is needed for and immediately adjacent to the operation upon which your request is based, including a demonstration that prohibiting expansion of the operation onto that land would unfairly impact the viability of the operation as originally planned before the land came under the protection of § 761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e).

(4) *Requirements for standards for mine roads.* If your request relies upon one of the standards for roads in paragraphs (c)(1) through (c)(3) of the definition of valid existing rights in § 761.5, you must submit satisfactory documentation that:

(i) The road existed when the land upon which it is located came under the protection of § 761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e), and you have a legal right to use the road for surface coal mining operations;

(ii) A properly recorded right of way or easement for a road in that location existed when the land came under the

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protection of §761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e), and, under the document creating the right of way or easement, and under any subsequent conveyances, you have a legal right to use or construct a road across that right of way or easement to conduct surface coal mining operations; or

(iii) A valid permit for use or construction of a road in that location for surface coal mining operations existed when the land came under the protection of §761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e).

(c) *Initial review of request.* (1) The agency must conduct an initial review to determine whether your request includes all applicable components of the submission requirements of paragraph (b) of this section. This review pertains only to the completeness of the request, not the legal or technical adequacy of the materials submitted.

(2) If your request does not include all applicable components of the submission requirements of paragraph (b) of this section, the agency must notify you and establish a reasonable time for submission of the missing information.

(3) When your request includes all applicable components of the submission requirements of paragraph (b) of this section, the agency must implement the notice and comment requirements of paragraph (d) of this section.

(4) If you do not provide information that the agency requests under paragraph (c)(2) of this section within the time specified or as subsequently extended, the agency must issue a determination that you have not demonstrated valid existing rights, as provided in paragraph (e)(4) of this section.

(d) *Notice and comment requirements and procedures.* (1) When your request satisfies the completeness requirements of paragraph (c) of this section, the agency must publish a notice in a newspaper of general circulation in the county in which the land is located. This notice must invite comment on the merits of the request. Alternatively, the agency may require that you publish this notice and provide the agency with a copy of the published notice. We will publish a similar notice in the FEDERAL REGISTER if your request involves Federal lands within an area

listed in §761.11(a) or (b). Each notice must include:

(i) The location of the land to which the request pertains.

(ii) A description of the type of surface coal mining operations planned.

(iii) A reference to and brief description of the applicable standard(s) under the definition of valid existing rights in §761.5.

(A) If your request relies upon the good faith/all permits standard or the needed for and adjacent standard in paragraph (b) of the definition of valid existing rights in §761.5, the notice also must include a description of the property rights that you claim and the basis for your claim.

(B) If your request relies upon the standard in paragraph (c)(1) of the definition of valid existing rights in §761.5, the notice also must include a description of the basis for your claim that the road existed when the land came under the protection of §761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e). In addition, the notice must include a description of the basis for your claim that you have a legal right to use that road for surface coal mining operations.

(C) If your request relies upon the standard in paragraph (c)(2) of the definition of valid existing rights in §761.5, the notice also must include a description of the basis for your claim that a properly recorded right of way or easement for a road in that location existed when the land came under the protection of §761.11 or 30 U.S.C. 1272(e). In addition, the notice must include a description of the basis for your claim that, under the document creating the right of way or easement, and under any subsequent conveyances, you have a legal right to use or construct a road across the right of way or easement to conduct surface coal mining operations.

(iv) If your request relies upon one or more of the standards in paragraphs (b), (c)(1), and (c)(2) of the definition of valid existing rights in §761.5, a statement that the agency will not make a decision on the merits of your request if, by the close of the comment period under this notice or the notice required by paragraph (d)(3) of this section, a person with a legal interest in the land initiates appropriate legal action in

the proper venue to resolve any differences concerning the validity or interpretation of the deed, lease, easement, or other documents that form the basis of your claim.

(v) A description of the procedures that the agency will follow in processing your request.

(vi) The closing date of the comment period, which must be a minimum of 30 days after the publication date of the notice.

(vii) A statement that interested persons may obtain a 30-day extension of the comment period upon request.

(viii) The name and address of the agency office where a copy of the request is available for public inspection and to which comments and requests for extension of the comment period should be sent.

(2) The agency must promptly provide a copy of the notice required under paragraph (d)(1) of this section to:

(i) All reasonably locatable owners of surface and mineral estates in the land included in your request.

(ii) The owner of the feature causing the land to come under the protection of § 761.11, and, when applicable, the agency with primary jurisdiction over the feature with respect to the values causing the land to come under the protection of § 761.11. For example, both the landowner and the State Historic Preservation Officer must be notified if surface coal mining operations would adversely impact any site listed on the National Register of Historic Places. As another example, both the surface owner and the National Park Service must be notified if the request includes non-Federal lands within the authorized boundaries of a unit of the National Park System.

(3) The letter transmitting the notice required under paragraph (d)(2) of this section must provide a 30-day comment period, starting from the date of service of the letter, and specify that another 30 days is available upon request. At its discretion, the agency responsible for the determination of valid existing rights may grant additional time for good cause upon request. The agency need not necessarily consider comments received after the closing date of the comment period.

(e) *How a decision will be made.* (1) The agency responsible for making the determination of valid existing rights must review the materials submitted under paragraph (b) of this section, comments received under paragraph (d) of this section, and any other relevant, reasonably available information to determine whether the record is sufficiently complete and adequate to support a decision on the merits of the request. If not, the agency must notify you in writing, explaining the inadequacy of the record and requesting submittal, within a specified reasonable time, of any additional information that the agency deems necessary to remedy the inadequacy.

(2) Once the record is complete and adequate, the responsible agency must determine whether you have demonstrated valid existing rights. The decision document must explain how you have or have not satisfied all applicable elements of the definition of valid existing rights in § 761.5. It must contain findings of fact and conclusions, and it must specify the reasons for the conclusions.

(3) *Impact of property rights disagreements.* This paragraph applies only when your request relies upon one or more of the standards in paragraphs (b), (c)(1), and (c)(2) of the definition of valid existing rights in § 761.5.

(i) The agency must issue a determination that you have not demonstrated valid existing rights if your property rights claims are the subject of pending litigation in a court or administrative body with jurisdiction over the property rights in question. The agency will make this determination without prejudice, meaning that you may refile the request once the property rights dispute is finally adjudicated. This paragraph applies only to situations in which legal action has been initiated as of the closing date of the comment period under paragraph (d)(1) or (d)(3) of this section.

(ii) If the record indicates disagreement as to the accuracy of your property rights claims, but this disagreement is not the subject of pending litigation in a court or administrative agency of competent jurisdiction, the agency must evaluate the merits of the

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information in the record and determine whether you have demonstrated that the requisite property rights exist under paragraph (a), (c)(1), or (c)(2) of the definition of valid existing rights in §761.5, as appropriate. The agency must then proceed with the decision process under paragraph (e)(2) of this section.

(4) The agency must issue a determination that you have not demonstrated valid existing rights if you do not submit information that the agency requests under paragraph (c)(2) or (e)(1) of this section within the time specified or as subsequently extended. The agency will make this determination without prejudice, meaning that you may refile a revised request at any time.

(5) After making a determination, the agency must:

(i) Provide a copy of the determination, together with an explanation of appeal rights and procedures, to you, to the owner or owners of the land to which the determination applies, to the owner of the feature causing the land to come under the protection of §761.11, and, when applicable, to the agency with primary jurisdiction over the feature with respect to the values that caused the land to come under the protection of §761.11.

(ii) Publish notice of the determination in a newspaper of general circulation in the county in which the land is located. Alternatively, the agency may require that you publish this notice and provide a copy of the published notice to the agency. We will publish the determination, together with an explanation of appeal rights and procedures, in the FEDERAL REGISTER if your request includes Federal lands within an area listed in §761.11(a) or (b).

(f) *Administrative and judicial review.* A determination that you have or do not have valid existing rights is subject to administrative and judicial review under §§775.11 and 775.13 of this chapter.

(g) *Availability of records.* The agency responsible for processing a request subject to notice and comment under paragraph (d) of this section must make a copy of that request available to the public in the same manner as the agency, when acting as the regu-

latory authority, must make permit applications available to the public under §773.6(d) of this chapter. In addition, the agency must make records associated with that request, and any subsequent determination under paragraph (e) of this section, available to the public in accordance with the requirements and procedures of §840.14 or §842.16 of this chapter.

[64 FR 70833, Dec. 17, 1999, as amended at 75 FR 60275, Sept. 29, 2010]

§761.17 Regulatory authority obligations at time of permit application review.

(a) Upon receipt of an administratively complete application for a permit for a surface coal mining operation, or an administratively complete application for revision of the boundaries of a surface coal mining operation permit, the regulatory authority must review the application to determine whether the proposed surface coal mining operation would be located on any lands protected under §761.11.

(b) The regulatory authority must reject any portion of the application that would locate surface coal mining operations on land protected under §761.11 unless:

(1) The site qualifies for the exception for existing operations under §761.12;

(2) A person has valid existing rights for the land, as determined under §761.16;

(3) The applicant obtains a waiver or exception from the prohibitions of §761.11 in accordance with §§761.13 through 761.15; or

(4) For lands protected by §761.11(c), both the regulatory authority and the agency with jurisdiction over the park or place jointly approve the proposed operation in accordance with paragraph (d) of this section.

(c) *Location verification.* If the regulatory authority has difficulty determining whether an application includes land within an area specified in §761.11(a) or within the specified distance from a structure or feature listed in §761.11(f) or (g), the regulatory authority must request that the Federal, State, or local governmental agency with jurisdiction over the protected

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land, structure, or feature verify the location.

(1) The request for location verification must:

(i) Include relevant portions of the permit application.

(ii) Provide the agency with 30 days after receipt to respond, with a notice that another 30 days is available upon request.

(iii) Specify that the regulatory authority will not necessarily consider a response received after the comment period provided under paragraph (c)(1)(ii) of this section.

(2) If the agency does not respond in a timely manner, the regulatory authority may make the necessary determination based on available information.

(d) *Procedures for joint approval of surface coal mining operations that will adversely affect publicly owned parks or historic places.* (1) If the regulatory authority determines that the proposed surface coal mining operation will adversely affect any publicly owned park or any place included in the National Register of Historic Places, the regulatory authority must request that the Federal, State, or local agency with jurisdiction over the park or place either approve or object to the proposed operation. The request must:

(i) Include a copy of applicable parts of the permit application.

(ii) Provide the agency with 30 days after receipt to respond, with a notice that another 30 days is available upon request.

(iii) State that failure to interpose an objection within the time specified under paragraph (d)(1)(ii) of this section will constitute approval of the proposed operation.

(2) The regulatory authority may not issue a permit for a proposed operation subject to paragraph (d)(1) of this section unless all affected agencies jointly approve.

(3) Paragraphs (d)(1) and (d)(2) of this section do not apply to:

(i) Lands for which a person has valid existing rights, as determined under § 761.16.

(ii) Lands within the scope of the exception for existing operations in § 761.12.

[64 FR 70836, Dec. 17, 1999]

§ 761.200 Interpretative rule related to subsidence due to underground coal mining in areas designated by Act of Congress.

OSM has adopted the following interpretation of rules promulgated in part 761.

(a) *Interpretation of § 761.11—Areas where mining is prohibited or limited.* Subsidence due to underground coal mining is not included in the definition of surface coal mining operations under section 701(28) of the Act and § 700.5 of this chapter and therefore is not prohibited in areas protected under section 522(e) of the Act.

(b) [Reserved]

[64 FR 70866, Dec. 17, 1999]

PART 762—CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATING AREAS AS UNSUITABLE FOR SURFACE COAL MINING OPERATIONS

Sec.

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762.4 Responsibility.

762.5 Definitions.

762.11 Criteria for designating lands as unsuitable.

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762.13 Land exempt from designation as unsuitable for surface coal mining operations.

762.14 Applicability to lands designated as unsuitable by Congress.

762.15 Exploration on land designated as unsuitable for surface coal mining operations.

AUTHORITY: 30 U.S.C. 1201 *et seq.*

SOURCE: 48 FR 41350, Sept. 14, 1983, unless otherwise noted.

§ 762.1 Scope.

This part establishes the minimum criteria to be used in determining whether lands should be designated as unsuitable for all or certain types of surface coal mining operations.

§ 762.4 Responsibility.

The regulatory authority or OSM shall use the criteria in this part for the evaluation of each petition for the designation of areas as unsuitable for surface coal mining operations.

§ 762.5 Definitions.

For purposes of this part: