SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: When we began preparation of the Gillette South CBM EIS in June of 1996, we had developed a proposed action to analyze a total of 640 CBM wells. This proposed action was based on the best available information we had from industry at that time. It took into account potential development based on depth to coal and what industry knew at that time about the potential to produce methane from the coal. The proposed action also included the prior Marquiss and Lighthouse CBM projects to address developmental changes which had occurred since these two projects had been analyzed by EAs. When we completed the EIS in October of 1997, the apparent success of the coalbed methane play was drawing additional operators into the basin. The following are some of the major issues raised during the preparation of the Gillette South CBM EIS. These issues are provided to help you understand what has occurred in past environmental documents and perhaps stimulate addition thoughts, questions, and issues.

- People were concerned with the loss of hydraulic head related to groundwater associated with the coal seam. Concerns related to lowering of water levels and increased pumping costs because water would have to be pumped from greater depths.
- Concerns were voiced on how the differentiation would be made between coal mine-caused and coalbed methane-caused impacts to the lowering of the water in the coal seam. How would the responsible entity be identified?
- Questions were posed on what effects the coalbed methane development would have on air quality. Of concern were possible hazardous emissions and pollutants released as a result of compressor emissions.
- Disposing water on the surface raised concerns about water quality due to possible increased erosion and possible weed infestations because of water flow fluctuations.
- Questions were raised about the use of produced water for dust control, stock watering, and the creation of wetlands. What were the ramifications of using this water in this manner?
- Concern was voiced that the mines had been venting methane for years and now we had companies working to recover the methane and pay royalty on production. Were we going to make the mines pay back royalty and future royalty for the methane they vent?
- There were concerns that we had not done further groundwater modeling to predict possible drawdowns and impacts.
- Concern was voiced about the use of the 1988 CHIA (Cumulative Potential Hydrologic Impacts of Surface Coal Mining in the Eastern Powder River Structural Basin, Northeastern Wyoming) and how this affected cumulative impacts.
- Concerns were voiced that previous documents had underestimated the magnitude of impacts when in actuality we had underestimated rate of impact occurrence.
- Concerns were raised that we had not addressed impacts to threatened and endangered species, raptors, and fisheries.
- Concern was expressed about the effects of surface disposal of water and operating a ranch with ongoing methane development operations.

BLM held a meeting with companies on November 19, 1997, to discuss the implications of the recently signed Record of Decision for the Gillette South EIS. This meeting covered the mitigation steps that would be required of those operators developing Federal minerals. Specifically covered were monitoring requirements, use of the Water Well Agreement, and the formation of a groundwater monitoring group similar to the coal industry's Gillette Area Groundwater Monitoring Organization (GAGMO) Group. Another topic of discussion was the question of where the CBM operators thought development was headed. No specifics were voiced at this meeting, but the general consensus was that development over and above that analyzed in the Gillette South EIS was a certainty. BLM asked the operators to provide us feedback on their development plans so we could plan for future environmental analysis needs.

Feedback we received from industry indicated we could see an additional 2,600 to 3,000 CBM wells south of Gillette by the year 2007 if development success continues as it has been. With this information, BLM decided another EIS would be necessary to address this additional interest.

A public scoping meeting will be held on February 5, 1998, at 7 p.m., at the Holiday Inn in Gillette, Wyoming, to discuss this increased industry interest and solicit comments, questions, issues, or concerns you may have. We will use the feedback in the preparation of the EIS.

Dated: January 22, 1998.

Alan R. Pierson,

State Director.

[FR Doc. 98–2156 Filed 1–28–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310–22–P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

Notice of Intent To Prepare a Joint Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Impact Statement on a Proposed 30-year Expansion and Waste Management Plan for the Molycorp Mountain Pass Mine, Mountain Pass, California

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare a Joint Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on a proposed 30-year expansion and waste management plan for the Molycorp Mountain Pass Mine, Mountain Pass, California and notice of scoping meeting.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Needles Field Office, and the County of San Bernardino, in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act, will be directing the preparation of a joint EIR/EIS to be prepared by a third-party contractor on the impacts of a proposed 30-year mine expansion and waste management plan for the Molycorp Mountain Pass Mine, located in Mountain Pass, San Bernardino County, California.

DATES: Written comments will be accepted until February 28, 1998. A public scoping meeting will be held beginning at 7 p.m. on February 3, 1998, at the Baker Community Center, 73730 Baker Boulevard, Unit C, Baker, California.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be sent to the Needles Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, 101 West Spike's Road, Needles, California 92363, ATTN: Molycorp Mountain Pass Mine Project.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT: George R. Meckfessel, Planning and Environmental Coordinator, at (760) 326–7000.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In the early 1990s, Molycorp Inc. (Molycorp) developed a plan to expand its mining operations for an additional 30 years. Because the expansion area would exceed 25 percent of the vested area, Molycorp was required to obtain a Mining Conditional Use Permit from the County of San Bernardino. At the time that Molycorp proposed to expand its mining operations, portions of the main mine site were located on public land managed by BLM. Therefore, the original environmental review for the project was planned to be an EIR/EIS.

However, in 1992, Molycorp and BLM entered into a land transfer, which exchanged 879 acres of public land for 1,920 acres of private land. Due to the land transfer the environmental review was conducted as an EIR, with the County as the Lead Agency.

A Draft EIR was circulated for public review in December 1996. The comment period closed on February 12, 1997. Numerous comments were received from public agencies and private individuals, including the following:

- BLM
- U.S. Geological Survey
- National Park Service
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- California Regional Water Quality Control Board
- California Department of Transportation
- Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District
- County of San Bernardino Fire Department Hazardous Materials Division
- San Bernardino County Museum
- County of San Bernardino Division of Environmental Health Services
- The Desert Tortoise Council
- The Wilderness Society
- The Sierra Club, San Gorgonio Chapter
- Desert Survivors
- National Outdoor Coalition
- People Against Radioactive Dumps
- Best, Best & Krieger representing Primadonna Corporation
- Marjorie Mikels
- Dr. Howard Wilshire

The predominant issues identified by commentors involved waste discharges, off-site groundwater contamination, potential air contamination, and full disclosure of mine components and processes. Upon review of the numerous comments received, the County determined that additional technical analysis would be required to adequately address the issues raised by those commenting on the Draft EIR. The County concluded that the Draft EIR would need to be recirculated to provide for proper public review of the additional analysis.

During the summers of 1995 and 1996, releases were experienced in the 13-mile-long pipeline that carries waste discharges from the main mine processing area to the existing New Ivanpah Evaporation Pond. The New Ivanpah Evaporation Pond is located approximately 9 miles to the northeast of the main mine processing area. This pipeline crosses lands managed by the BLM and the NPS. The releases and subsequent issues related to integrity of the Ivanpah evaporation ponds heightened concerns about waste management and disposal. Molycorp indicated a desire to replace the discharge pipeline. The BLM felt that the environmental review process for considering a replacement pipeline would best be accomplished in concert with the County's consideration of the proposed expansion. Discussions with the County subsequently led to the decision to conduct a joint environmental review and to recirculate the 1996 Draft EIR as a Draft EIR/EIS that would add to the existing project the analysis of potential environmental impacts associated with replacing the waste discharge pipeline, and would also address issues of impacts to public lands from existing and potential contaminant migration from the main mine site and the existing New Ivanpah Evaporation Pond.

Comments received on the Draft EIR/EIS will be addressed in the Final EIR/EIS. Commentors on the December 1996 Draft EIR will be included in the distribution of the Draft EIR/EIS and are invited to provide comments on the Draft EIR/EIS.

Molycorp is proposing to continue its current lanthanide (rare-earth elements) mining operation at its Mountain Pass Mine facility for the next 30 years. This continued effort would result in an expansion of the open pit, overburden storage areas, and mill tailings storage areas. Plant production rates would not increase as a result of the project. Expansion of the mine would consist of enlarging the surface area and depth of the open pit, expanding existing overburden stockpiles, expanding the existing North Tailings Pond or constructing a new tailings pond, and replacing the existing waste discharge pipeline to the existing New Ivanpah Evaporation Pond, either through pipeline replacement, or the construction of an on-site effluent treatment facility, or a combination of both.

As described in the December 1996 Draft EIR, the mine expansion would occur over 30 years in three phases of 10 years each, with a final monitoring phase of 5 years. Phase I would include the following activities:

- Revisions to the existing means of waste disposal to the existing New Ivanpah Evaporation Pond, either through replacement of the existing pipeline, on-site effluent treatment, or a combination of both and potential modifications to or closure of the evaporation pond
- Continued mining and expansion of the pit westward by approximately 10 acres
- Realignment of power distribution lines
- Expansion of the west Overburden Stockpile by approximately 80 acres and realignment of the AT&T access road
- Expansion of the North Tailings Pond after retrofitting with a liner or design and construction of a new tailings pond and closure of the North Tailings Pond
- Relocation and expansion of the mine equipment yard
- Stockpiling of surface material from pit and overburden expansion for future reclamation of the tailings pond and overburden stockpiles.

Phase 2 would include the following:

- Expansion of the open pit by 35 acres
- Expansion of Overburden Stockpile by 125 acres
- Increase tailings pond by 60 acres
- Relocation of Shadow Valley water supply line and explosives magazine
- Initiation of reclamation and revegetation of tailings pond and Overburden Stockpile

Phase 3 would include the following:

- Expansion of the open pit by 35 acres
- Expansion of the Overburden Stockpile by 125 acres
- Increase tailings pond by 50 acres
- Continued reclamation and revegetation of tailings pond and Overburden Stockpile

Phase 4 would include the following:

- Termination of mining and contouring of pit slopes
- Closure of tailings pond
- Closure of hazardous waste holding area
- Final reclamation and revegetation of Overburden Stockpile and previously vegetated disturbed surfaces.

The Draft EIR/EIS will present final proposed acreages of mine facilities subject to final mine design.

The components of the project remain the same as those described in the December 1996 Draft EIR, with the exception of Molycorp facilities occurring on federally administered lands. Such facilities include the replacement of the waste discharge pipeline to the existing New Ivanpah Evaporation Pond and the replacement of the existing fresh water pipeline. Alternatives to the expansion project, as identified in the December 1996 EIR, include a No Project Alternative, a Reduced Project Alternative, and an Underground Mining Alternative. Other alternatives addressing the waste management plans will be included. These alternatives will include three waste discharge pipeline alternative alignments, two on-site treatment alternatives, including (1) full treatment at the main mine site with no discharge to the existing New Ivanpah

Evaporation Pond and closure of the evaporation pond and (2) partial treatment at the main mine site with continued discharge to the existing New Ivanpah Evaporation Pond, and a No Project alternative, whereby no action would be taken to replace the pipeline or provide on-site treatment.

During preparation of the December 1996 Draft EIR, significant impacts to the environment from the project and the project alternatives were identified in the following issue areas: Geologic Hazards, Flood Hazards, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Air Quality, Scenic Resources, Soil Resources, and Hazardous/Radioactive Materials. Cumulative impacts were also identified in these issue areas. The Draft EIR/EIS will review the impact assessment provided in the December 1996 Draft EIR in light of comments received from agencies and the public during the December 1996 Draft EIR circulation period and will revise the impact assessment in accordance with the components and activities of the redesigned project.

The Draft EIR/EIS will also evaluate potential impacts of the pipeline replacement project and alternatives as well as the potential impacts from continuing contaminant migration from the main mine site from continuing operations. Technical studies are planned or underway in the following areas:

- Survey of the existing waste discharge pipeline for contamination from potential past releases
- Evaluation of the biological resources along the corridors of the pipeline alternatives
- Evaluation of cultural and paleontological resources in the area of the pipeline replacement alternatives
- Hydrology studies of the main mine site and nearby washes
- Hydrology studies of the existing New Ivanpah Evaporation Pond
- Waste discharge treatment alternatives
- Pipeline alignment alternatives
- Human health and ecological risk assessments
- Pit lake water quality modeling

The Draft EIR/EIS will use the data provided in the technical reports to analyze the potential impacts to the environment from the proposed project and alternatives.

A public scoping meeting will be held at the Baker Community Center, 73730 Baker Boulevard, Unit C, Baker, California, on February 3, 1998 at 7 p.m. Upon close of the comment period for the joint Notice of Preparation (NOP)/ Notice of Intent (NOI), the County and BLM will direct the preparation of the Draft EIR/EIS. It is anticipated that the Draft document will be available for circulation within 6 to 8 months. The Draft EIR/EIS will be circulated for 60 days, during which time comments will be solicited from interested parties and organizations and a public hearing will be held. The Final EIR/EIS is expected to be completed within 3 to 4 months following close of the comment period.

The BLM scoping process for this EIR/ EIS will include the following: (1) Identification of issues to be addressed, (2) identification of viable alternatives, and (3) notification of interest groups, individuals, and agencies so that additional information concerning these issues can be obtained.

The scoping process will consist of a news release announcing the start of the EIR/EIS process and letters of invitation to participate in the scoping process.

Molly S. Brady,

Manager, Needles Field Office.

[FR Doc. 98–2311 Filed 1–28–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310–40–P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[NM–070–7110–8389; NMNM97589]

Notice of Realty Action—Recreation and Public Purpose (R&PP) Act Classification, New Mexico

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of R&PP lease/patent of public land in San Juan County, New Mexico.

SUMMARY: The following described public land is determined suitable for classification for leasing and patenting to the Lee/Hammond Water Treatment Plant (Lee/Hammond), Bloomfield, New Mexico under the provisions of the R&PP Act, as amended (43 U.S.C. 869 *et seq.*). Lee/Hammond proposes to use the land for water treatment facilities.

New Mexico Principal Meridian

T. 29 N., R. 11 W.,
Sec. 28, SE¼SW¼

Containing 40 acres, more or less.

DATES: On or before March 16, 1998, interested parties may submit comments regarding the proposed leasing and conveyance, or classification of the lands to the Bureau of Land Management at the following address. Any adverse comments will be reviewed by the Bureau of Land Management, Farmington District Manager, 1235 LaPlata Highway, Suite A, Farmington, NM 87401, who may sustain, vacate, or modify this realty action. In the absence of any adverse comments, this realty action becomes the final determination of the Department of the Interior and effective 60 days from publication date.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Information related to this action, including the environmental assessment, is available for review at the Bureau of Land Management, Farmington District Office, 1235 LaPlata Highway, Suite A, Farmington, NM 87401.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Publication of this notice segregates the public land described above from all other forms of appropriation under the public land laws, including the general mining laws, except for leasing and conveyance under the R&PP Act and leasing under the mineral leasing laws for a period of two (2) years from date of this publication in the **Federal Register**. The segregative affect will terminate upon issuance of the lease and patent to Lee/Hammond, or two (2) years from the date of this publication, whichever occurs first.

The lease, when issued, will be subject to the following terms:

1. Provisions of the R&PP Act and to all applicable regulations of the Secretary of the Interior.
2. Provisions of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976 (RCRA) as amended, 42 U.S.C. 6901–6987 and the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA) as amended, 42 U.S.C. 9601 and all applicable regulations.
3. Provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
4. Provisions that the lease be operated in compliance with the approved Development Plan.

The patent, when issued, will be subject to the following terms:

1. Reservation to the United States of a right-of-way for ditches and canals in accordance with 43 U.S.C. 945.
2. Reservation to the United States of all minerals.
3. All valid existing rights, e.g., rights-of-way and leases of record.
4. Provisions that if the patentee or its successor attempts to transfer title to or control over the land to another or the land is devoted to a use other than that for which the land was conveyed, without the consent of the Secretary of the Interior or his delegate, or prohibits or restricts, directly or indirectly, or permits it agents, employees, contractors, or subcontractors, including without limitation, lessees, sublessees and permittees), to prohibit or restrict, directly or indirectly, the use of any part of the patented lands or any of the