

The proposed action, which crosses federal lands in the States of California, Arizona and New Mexico, includes an amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan which, if approved, will allow an exception to construct portions of this project along existing highways instead of within designated utility corridors on federal lands in Riverside, Imperial and San Diego Counties, California.

The proposed Project would consist of five links or points-of-presence (POP) connecting: (1) Lamesa to El Paso, Texas; (2) El Paso to Tucson, Arizona; (3) Tucson to Blythe, California; (4) Blythe to San Diego, California; and (5) San Diego to Los Angeles, California. The purpose being to construct, operate and maintain a buried fiber optic telecommunications system, including signal regeneration or optical amplification stations located every 40–50 miles, between Texas and California.

Copies are available for public review at Bureau of Land Management offices in: Las Cruces, New Mexico; Safford, Tucson, Phoenix and Yuma, Arizona; and Palm Springs, El Centro, and Riverside, California. In addition copies will be available at the Environmental Office of Camp Pendleton as well as the Descanso Ranger District of the Cleveland National Forest. Furthermore, public reading copies may be downloaded from the following website: http://www.ca.blm.gov/cdd/att_nexgen_ea.html.

DATES: Written comments on this document must be submitted or postmarked no later than February 20, 2001.

ADDRESSES: Written comments on this document should be addressed to: Stephen Johnson, Special Projects Manager, BLM California Desert District, 6221 Box Springs Blvd., Riverside, CA 92507.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Stephen Johnson, Special Projects Manager, at the above address or by phone at (909) 697–5233.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The project configuration, as proposed and including measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts on the environment, is being considered along with a “No Project” and “Utility Corridor” alternative. The BLM has been asked to issue rights-of-way for portions of this fiber optic system that cross public lands.

The California portion of this Project, which as proposed includes an exception to the CDCA Plan to construction portions along existing roads instead of within designated

utility corridors, begins at the Point of Presence (POP) in Blythe, California, and would travel in a southwesterly direction along Highway 78 and Old Highway 80 through the following city jurisdictions: Blythe, Brawley, El Centro, El Cajon, La Mesa, and San Diego. From San Diego north to Los Angeles the route would primarily parallel the coast traversing the U.S. Marine Corps Camp Pendleton. In addition, the route would pass through large portions of unincorporated areas in Riverside, Imperial and San Diego Counties, and besides public lands administered by the BLM, it would also cross the Descanso Ranger District of Cleveland National Forest, the USMC’s Camp Pendleton, as well as the La Posta and Campo Indian Reservations. It would require an urban build through San Diego and Los Angeles, terminating at the POP in Los Angeles, California.

The fiber optic telecommunications system project entails the design and construction of a six-duct conduit system and ancillary facilities to accommodate digital broadband Internet Protocol. Ancillary facilities would include: regeneration stations and Optical Amplification (Op Amp) Stations spaced an average of 50 miles; buried splice boxes placed at 2,500-foot intervals; and marker poles placed 500 feet apart. The Project, as described in the EA, should contribute small to no additional impact to the environment and would operate entirely within previously disturbed and routinely maintained road rights-of-way.

Dated: December 12, 2000.

Alan Stein,

Acting District Manager.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[MT–020–1610–DH CBMP]

Notice of Intent To Amend the Powder River and Billings Resource Management Plans (RMPs) and Conduct Scoping Meetings, Montana

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Miles City and Billings Field Offices, Interior.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: BLM will prepare an Oil and Gas Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) jointly with the State of Montana (State). The planning area for the BLM will be the BLM-administered

oil and gas estate within the Powder River and Billings RMP areas. The planning area for the State will be potential coal bed methane development areas around the state. The RMP Amendment will be based on the existing statutory requirements and will meet the requirements of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976. The RMP Amendment will guide BLM’s oil and gas decisions within the Powder River and Billings RMP areas and help the State evaluate effects of further oil and gas permit applications. The Draft EIS and RMP Amendment is scheduled for completion by September 2001. The Final EIS and Proposed RMP Amendment is scheduled for March 2002.

The public is asked to help BLM and the State identify issues, concerns and alternatives. Draft Planning Criteria to help guide the effort have also been developed for public comment.

DATES: Any issues, concerns, or alternatives should be submitted to BLM on or before January 17, 2001. Public scoping meetings are scheduled as follows:

1. January 4, 2001, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., Billings, Montana
2. January 9, 2001, 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Broadus, Montana
3. January 9, 2001, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., Ashland, Montana
4. January 10, 2001, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., Miles City, Montana
5. January 11, 2001, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., Helena, Montana

ADDRESSES: All submissions should be sent to the following address: BLM, Mary Bloom, BLM Project Leader, 111 Garryowen Road, Miles City, Montana, 59301.

The public scoping meetings will be held at the following locations:

1. Billings—Lewis and Clark Room in the Student Union Building of the Montana State University-Billings
2. Broadus—Community Center at the Powder River County Fairgrounds
3. Ashland—Multi-purpose Room of the Ashland Public Elementary School on Highway 212
4. Miles City—Room 106 of Miles Community College
5. Helena—Director’s Conference Room #111, Metcalf Building, 1520 East Sixth Avenue

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mary Bloom, BLM Project Leader, (406) 233–3649.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The BLM and the State of Montana are co-leads for the effort. The BLM’s planning area is BLM-administered oil and gas in the

Powder River and Billings RMP areas. The Powder River RMP area consists of Treasure, Rosebud, Powder River, Carter, and portions of Custer and Big Horn counties. The Billings RMP area consists of Wheatland, Golden Valley, Musselshell, Sweet Grass, Stillwater, Yellowstone, Carbon, and a portion of Big Horn counties. The State of Montana will evaluate the effects of further permit applications in BLM's planning area and other areas around the state including portions of Blaine, Park and Gallatin counties. BLM and the state have drafted a Memorandum of Understanding to conduct a joint EIS. The joint EIS will analyze impacts to resources as a result of oil and gas, including coal bed methane, development.

The Powder River and Billings RMPs, as amended by BLM's 1994 "Oil and Gas Amendment of the Billings, Powder River and South Dakota RMPs" support limited conventional oil and gas development and coal bed methane exploration and production. Numerous conventional oil and gas wells are located on state and federal minerals in the planning area. An October 18, 2000 meeting of the Coal Bed Methane Coordination Group indicates that industry projects drilling approximately 10,000 coal bed methane wells in the Montana portion of the Powder River Basin over the next 10 years, in addition to an unspecified number of conventional oil and gas wells. In order to analyze an increased interest in oil and gas activity, an EIS and RMP amendment is being prepared.

The public is asked to assist the BLM and the State with identification of issues related to oil and gas development, including coal bed methane. Examples of potential issues (problems, concerns) are: Water (surface and ground), socioeconomics, soils, water, Air, vegetation and wildlife.

Alternatives will be developed to present a range of feasible management actions. The "No Action Alternative" will be included in accordance with 40 CFR 1502.14(d) and represent the continuation of current management.

Development of this RMP Amendment will require involvement of professionals from these disciplines: Air quality, cultural resources, economics, hazardous materials, hydrology, lands, realty, minerals, geology, paleontology, recreation, sociology, soils, vegetation, and wildlife.

Planning criteria help guide the development of the Amendment and EIS by focusing efforts where they are needed, providing direction for the plan, and identifying legal, policy, or regulatory constraints that direct or

limit BLM's ability to resolve issues. After taking into consideration the public's comments on the criteria, they will be finalized to help guide the plan.

The public will be provided the opportunity to review and comment on issues identified by BLM and the State, identify new issues, and comment on the Draft Planning Criteria. A mailing list is being developed and will be used to communicate with and solicit comments from local, state and federal agencies, Native American tribes, the Eastern Montana Resource Advisory Council, and the public at large that may be affected by the plan. As the planning process proceeds, these publics will be encouraged to participate.

Public information will be available at scoping meetings to be held at Broadus, Miles City, Ashland, Billings and Helena, Montana from January 4 through January 11, 2001. See **DATES** and **ADDRESSES** sections for specific meeting information.

The BLM and the State are seeking information from individuals, organizations, and agencies that may be affected by the plan. Specifically, we request any issues, concerns or alternatives that should be addressed in the plan amendment.

This notice meets the requirements of 40 CFR 1501.7 and 43 CFR 1610.2(c).

Dated: December 5, 2000.

Fred O'Ferrall,

Assistant Field Manager.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

(MTM 90527; IDI 33690)

Notice of Proposed Withdrawal and Opportunity for Public Meeting; Montana and Idaho

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, has filed an application to withdraw 2,548.42 acres of National Forest System land to preserve the unique resources of Lemhi Pass National Historic Landmark. This notice closes the land for up to 2 years from location and entry under the United States mining laws. The land will remain open to all activities currently consistent with applicable Forest plans and those related to exercise of valid existing rights.

DATES: Comments and requests for a public meeting must be received by March 19, 2001.

ADDRESSES: Comments and meeting requests should be sent to the Forest Supervisor, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, Montana 59725-3572.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Katie Bump, Project Coordinator, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, Montana 59725-3572.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On November 28, 2000, the Forest Service filed an application to withdraw the following-described National Forest System land from location and entry under the United States mining laws, but not the mineral leasing laws, subject to valid existing rights:

Principal Meridian, Montana

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (462.16 acres)

T. 10 S., R. 15 W.,

Sec. 9, lots 1 to 4, inclusive, and E $\frac{1}{2}$ E $\frac{1}{2}$;

Sec. 16, lots 1 and 2, and E $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$.

Boise Meridian

Salmon-Challis National Forest (1,043.13 acres)

T. 19 N., R. 25 E.,

Sec. 10, S $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$;

Sec. 11, lot 4, S $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, and SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$;

Sec. 14, lots 1 to 5, inclusive, lots 7 and 8, NW $\frac{1}{4}$, and W $\frac{1}{2}$ E $\frac{1}{2}$;

Sec. 15, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ and N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$.

The area described contains approximately 2,548.42 acres in Beaverhead County, Montana, and Lemhi County, Idaho.

In addition, any non-federal lands within the boundary described above, if acquired by the United States, would become subject to the terms and conditions of this withdrawal.

For a period of 90 days from the date of publication of this notice, all persons who wish to submit comments, suggestions, or objections in connection with the proposed withdrawal may present their views in writing to the Forest Supervisor, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, at the address indicated above.

Notice is hereby given that an opportunity for a public meeting is afforded in connection with the proposed withdrawal. All interested persons who desire a public meeting for the purpose of being heard on the proposed withdrawal must submit a written request to the Forest Supervisor at the address indicated above within 90 days from the date of publication of this notice. Upon determination by the authorized officer that a public meeting