

**GEOLOGIC RESOURCES DIVISION
NATIONAL NATURAL RESOURCES PROGRAM CENTER
Monthly Report - July 1995**

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GENERAL

External Mineral Planning Near Many Parks Announced - The Geologic Resources Division sent maps and listings of U.S. Forests and Bureau of Land Management resource areas that are in the process of updating their area plans. This information went to all affected field area system support offices. The planning areas are on fluctuating plan update schedules, much like the National Park Service general management plan schedules. The agency plans are an integral first step to minerals planning near parks and provide parks with a chance to influence planning. Park staff can work with the agency, noting areas of concern and identifying areas for specific operating restrictions. The Division annually advises central offices of the planning schedules. If park staff are unaware of the planning schedule of any adjacent BLM or U.S. Forest area, they may contact their system support office or this office. The Division also offers assistance to parks that may need guidance regarding what mineral development restrictions may be necessary and appropriate. (Geniac)

Agreement Signed to Foster Federal Coordination on Mining Issues

- After several years of negotiation, the NPS, Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency signed an interagency agreement addressing a broad array of programmatic minerals issues. Cooperative efforts under the agreement will range from rulemakings to research to training. While site specific development proposals may be discussed under the agreement, the focus of such discussions will be on the generic concern raised by the specific proposal. For example, the need to mitigate acid mine drainage at a particular mine site may result in the signatory agencies undertaking a cooperative research effort to examine the overall effectiveness of available acid mine drainage mitigation measures under a variety of environmental conditions. Under the agreement, three individuals from each signatory agency will participate in periodic meetings to discuss issues of mutual concern. For the NPS, the Chiefs of the Geologic Resources Division and Water Resources Division and the Manager of the WASO Hazardous and Solid Waste Program will represent the Service at these meetings. If you would like a copy of the agreement, please call Carol McCoy at 303 969-2096. (McCoy)

ALASKA FIELD AREA

Division Evaluates Denali Statement for Management - Division staff evaluated the draft Statement for Management for Denali National Park in terms of minerals management issues and strategies to resolve such issues. The Division determined the document appropriately addressed several minerals-related issues, including administrative sand and gravel extraction, ecosystem-based regional land use planning, administrative efforts to expedite acquisition of mining claims in the Kantishna area, and hazardous materials management. The Division suggested that the document also address abandoned mineral land safety and reclamation issues, management objectives, and resolution strategies if such issues exist in the park. (Woods)

PACIFIC WEST FIELD AREA

Death Valley's Abandoned Mineral Land Plan Facilitates a Look at the Process - Death Valley submitted an abandoned mineral land (AML) plan for review. It accurately followed the existing guidance on how such plans should be done. The detail that addressed the outlined topics was impressive. Main concerns, recognized by the park, are the safety of visitors and staff and the liability associated with safety. The Division suggested that the park evaluate the number of mines that need to stay open to maintain the historical integrity of this historic mining area. In conjunction with the openings, the Division urged that entering mines be permitted only where the park's mining engineer made safety inspections prior to each entry. The Division also suggested that all other mine openings should be closed, noting that such closures can be done in ways unobtrusive to the historic landscape. We note that the existing guidance, issued by the Western Regional Office with input from Division staff, has become outdated. Advancements have been made in closure methods. The Division sent the updated information to the park, and such information is available to all NPS units and offices upon request. With continually escalating Servicewide concerns, regarding both private and park abandoned sand and gravel pits, we are now examining ways for parks to address these concerns in future documents. (Geniac)

INTERMOUNTAIN FIELD AREA

One Last Gasp For Plaintiffs At The District Court In the Padre Island Lawsuit - One week after the District Court for the Southern District of Texas ruled that the National Park Service has authority to regulate nonfederal oil and gas operations, Plaintiffs asked the court to modify its order. The scope of the modification concerned that part of the court's ruling barring the assertion of Plaintiffs' claims because they were filed past the statute of limitations deadline. Plaintiffs attempted this post mortem resurrection by arguing that though most of their claims were filed after the limitations period had run, some of their claims

survived. Though the Department of Justice, representing NPS, filed a strong response, the true nature of Plaintiffs' 12-page motion is best reflected by the court's one paragraph order denying the motion without comment. Plaintiffs are expected to file an appeal in this case, but are not likely to prevail. (Kassman)

Geologic and Water Resources Staff Working on Guidelines for Sampling at Contaminated Sites - A recurring problem at Texas' Padre Island National Seashore has been the adequate and timely review of data and remediation plans proposed by operators for contaminated areas. A draft servicewide standard operating procedure for sampling techniques and standards proposed last fall is currently on hold pending completion of Environmental Protection Agency stormwater discharge regulations. In the meantime, the park needs guidance for ongoing projects. With that in mind, Division staff met with Gary Rosenlieb and Roy Irwin, both Water Resource Division staff, to prepare interim guidelines. After a very productive set of meetings a rough outline was established that will be sent to the park and Southwest System Support Office as soon as additional toxicological data can be incorporated into the package. The guidelines will include recommended sampling procedures and analysis. These, together with the stormwater document and additional work done at Big Thicket, will probably form the basis for a servicewide standard operating procedure. The guidelines may also be incorporated in the soon to be released 9B Operator's Guide and the just initiated Padre Island Minerals Management Plan. The group also has planned an August trip to examine the sites and meet with one of the operators and their consultants. (Heise, Woods)

Petroleum Company Moves Forward with Exploration Well at Padre Island - Bright and Company built nearly two miles of new access road and a 2-acre drilling pad in preparation for drilling an exploratory well. The company is looking for new reserves of natural gas under Padre Island National Seashore. The mineral estate underlying Padre Island is privately owned. The NPS regulates private oil and gas activities under Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 9, Subpart B. Last December, the NPS completed its environmental review of Bright's plan of operations and gave approval for the project. Bright moved the drilling rig onto the location and began drilling in late July. It will take about two weeks of drilling to reach the well's projected depth of 8500' from surface. Only about 10 percent of exploration wells drilled in the United States ever make a discovery. If Bright can buck the odds, their plan also includes provisions for installing production facilities. (O'Dell)

Pipeline Plan Reviewed for Padre Island - The Division reviewed a draft plan of operations for Texas Eastern Transmission Corporation's existing pipeline operations in Padre Island. The plan covers continued operation of a 12-inch natural gas line. The plan of operations is needed to permit access for Texas Eastern to abandon a section of a 4-inch pipeline. The 4-inch line spurs off the 12-inch line and runs to a recently abandoned oil and gas well.

Both pipelines are not in use at present. The 12-inch pipeline is a lateral that connected the old Chevron site with Texas Eastern's main system west of Padre Island. Texas Eastern plans to maintain the line in hopes of it having some future use. While National Park Service regulations governing nonfederal oil and gas rights do not explicitly address transportation pipelines that cross National Park Service units, policy has been to treat pipelines just like other nonfederal oil and gas operations. Since the NPS doesn't grant new rights-of-way for pipelines in the absence of specific laws, most pipelines pre-date the parks and are not regulated by National Park Service. However, if a pipeline needs a new permit or needs new federal access to conduct operations, then the NPS regulations can be applied. Texas Eastern needed federal access to abandon the 4-inch line. Our review found the proposed plan of operations to contain the information needed under the regulations. A noteworthy point is Texas Eastern's proposal to abandon the 4-inch pipeline in place, and we support the proposal. A vegetation survey provided in the plan demonstrates that seagrass beds and wetland areas have recovered since the 4-inch pipeline was installed in 1958. Removal of the line would only disrupt seagrass beds and wetlands for a second time with no clear benefit. The abandonment procedure includes "pigging" the line to remove any hydrocarbons, and purging it with nitrogen before capping the ends. These are good environmental protection measures. Most likely, Texas Eastern will abandon the 12-inch line in the same manner sometime in the future. (O'Dell)

Southern Utah Parks Witness Additional Oil and Gas Activity - In addition to new seismic acquisition proposed near Hovenweep National Monument, other southern Utah parks are seeing oil and gas related activities. The Dixie National Forest Oil and Gas Leasing Plan and environmental impact statement under development may impact Zion, Cedar Breaks, Bryce Canyon, and Capitol Reef. The superintendents from these four parks are meeting to discuss the appropriate response to the Dixie on park concerns, and may require Division assistance. The National Parks and Conservation Association is greatly concerned about the treatment the document affords the parks, and has asked the Division for additional information about the situation. The Association has also asked the Division for additional information about the proposed Viking Well in Glen Canyon. We briefed them on our knowledge of the situation. Their main concern is over the appropriateness of the Bureau of Land Management suspending the lease for 15 of the last 25 years. We suggested they contact the BLM for more information on that topic. (Heise)

Division, Support Offices, and Glen Canyon Commence Plans for Viking Environmental Assessment - Staff from the Geologic Resources Division, Utah's Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, and both Colorado Plateau and Southwest Systems Support Offices met to discuss how best to proceed with the Environmental Assessment required for the Viking Exploration's application for a permit to drill a well on an old lease inside the park. Topics discussed included park concerns, Bureau of Land Management interaction, bond

limits, and roles for each of the offices. While everyone agreed that a reasonable development scenario for the entire area is needed, we stated that the Bureau would be hesitant to require that for such a risky well wildcat. The park is drafting up a task directive that will assign specific tasks to each NPS office involved. The Division and park will go forward to the Bureau in the near future to discuss the approach, and an on-site meeting is planned for September. (Heise, Woods)

Colorado Oil and Gas Commission Contacts Division on Proposed Drilling Near Great Sand Dunes - Responding to earlier calls from the Division, the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission contacted us on NPS concerns over new wells proposed north of Great Sand Dunes National Monument. We relayed to them our concern over maintaining the existing surface water dynamics upon which the existence of the dunes depends. We also informed them that the park was talking to both the operator, Lexam Exploration, and the surface owner. The Commission agreed to notify us if Lexam applied for additional permits closer to the park. Drilling in the area is currently on hold pending resolution of local opposition from the county commissioners over drilling the first exploratory wells. It seems unlikely that any wells closer to the park will be drilled in the near term. In the interim, a site visit by Division and Great Sand Dunes staff may take place this fall. (Heise)

Geologic Resources Division First Out of the Starting Gate With New World Buyout Costs - On July 12, 1995, the Division formally transmitted detailed "buyout" costs of the proposed New World mine to the Montana Department of State Lands and the Gallatin National Forest, lead agencies in the New World Environmental Impact Statement process. Intense opposition to the proposed mine and close scrutiny of the EIS process by the public has driven the lead agencies to agree to examine a total buyout of Crown Butte Mining's viable New World mineral rights in the draft EIS. The need for a correct assessment of the proposed mine's "fair market value" was further exacerbated by careless and incorrect public statements by lead agency personnel placing a value on the mine of nearly a "billion dollars." The Division was compelled to immediately generate a statement of "fair market value" for the proposed mine before the billion dollar figure was carried any further in the press or by political figures. Staff generated estimates in accordance with *Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisition, 1992*, using available data from Crown Butte Mines, Inc. Applying accepted fair market value methods to the New World proposal revealed that potential market value of the mineral rights ranges from approximately \$10 million to \$75 million. The value estimated by the Division would only hold true if the mine is deemed permittable. Crown Butte Mines president, Joe Baylis, called the Division's buyout estimate "outrageously low," but did not offer an alternative figure. The New World value issue promises to be an exciting "politics versus reality" issue. Stay tuned. (Moss, Cloues)

New World Cooperating Agencies Meeting Draws a Lot of Power - Division staff and management representing environmental, technical, and policy branches attended a July 19 - 20, New World mine tour and cooperating agencies meeting in Yellowstone. In addition to Division and other usual cooperating and lead agency personnel, the tour and meeting were also attended by five Department of Justice Attorneys. The Department of Justice is getting up to speed on mine issues to prepare themselves for likely future litigation on the proposed mine. The tour of the proposed New World Mine site, located 2 1/2 miles northeast of the park, along with the visit to a location for an off site tailings impoundment near Cody, Wyoming, provided all participants with a good physical setting on which to base their assumptions regarding potential mine impacts. The cooperating agencies meeting, held on July 20th, was attended by over 30 people from Federal agencies, the public, newspaper reporters, and two television stations. The lead agencies provided project newcomers with a good overview of key issues and the overall progress of the draft Environmental Impact Statement. Cooperating agencies and the public requested the lead agencies further examine several significant issues including "reasonably foreseeable future actions" such as open pit mining near the proposed mine site and the importance of the company and lead agencies adopting special aquifer testing parameters agreed upon by the water quality EIS work group. As a result of the two intensive days of information gathering, the Department of Justice is well versed on issues surrounding the proposed New World mine and the ongoing draft EIS process. Hopefully, the attention brought upon the proposed project by this meeting will pay dividends in improved communication between all involved agencies. (Moss, Cloues, McCoy, Kassman)

NORTHEAST FIELD AREA

Geologic Resources "Relocated" at Shenandoah National Park - Beginning on June 22, 1995, a series of storms moved through Virginia bringing five days of moderate steady rains throughout Shenandoah. These rains saturated soils and other unconsolidated deposits. On June 26 localized storm cells caused heavy rains throughout the park; some areas received an excess of 12 inches of rain in about two hours. These heavy rains resulted in major landsliding and extreme flood discharges in the Rapidan, Staunton, and Moormans river drainages.

Shenandoah's Center for Resources, seeing an enormous opportunity for scientific input to management decisions, recruited a team of specialists to assess the changes caused by the event. This team included staff from the National Park Service Geologic Resources and Water Resources Divisions, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, Virginia Game & Inland Fisheries, University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, and several park staff. John Karish of the Chesapeake Systems Support Office led the scientific assessment. The team performed the following: (1) a rapid, qualitative assessment of resource conditions, with recommendations for immediate actions to

mitigate unsafe geologic conditions; (2) developed recommendations for quantitative scientific characterization of the event and its impacts; and (3) prepared preliminary materials to tell the story of the event and the assessment to park staff, politicians, the scientific community, visitors, and the public.

Significant stream channel changes are widespread. At least one, possibly several, debris torrents - rapid, channelized flows of saturated soil and organic debris that mobilized pickup-truck sized boulders - scoured the Staunton River channel. The Charlottesville reservoir lost one-third of its water storage capacity due to sediment transported through the Moormans River. Aquatic habitats, dependent on physical attributes, were similarly altered and will likely remain so for several years.

However, field evidence shows a sequence of several older landslide deposits underlying those deposited June 27. Although these events are infrequent in human lifetimes, the deposits suggest that the events seen in the June 27 flood are ongoing natural processes of landscape evolution and have occurred several times during the last few thousand years. Notwithstanding this major geomorphic event, Virginia's climate should allow stream channels, riparian zones, and aquatic habitats to recover to a structure similar to pre-flood conditions in 10-30 years. (Steensen)

SOUTHEAST FIELD AREA

Master Plan of Operations for Big Cypress is Approved - The National Park Service has approved a Master Plan of Operations for Calumet Florida, Inc. to conduct oil and gas operations in Big Cypress National Preserve. Calumet purchased Exxon USA's holdings in Big Cypress on March 15, 1993. The purchase included 24 active oil wells, two saltwater disposal wells, one shut-in oil, and the associated production facilities in the Bear Island, Pepper Hammock, and Raccoon Point oil fields. These operations comprise all of the active oil and gas operations in the Preserve. Calumet could have adopted Exxon's previously approved plan of operations, but chose to prepare a new plan. The new plan greatly expands potential operations in all three fields. Calumet's master plan includes continued operation of existing wells and facilities and new proposals to 1) install additional production facilities, 2) drill sixteen new wells, and 3) conduct seismic surveys at the Raccoon Point Field. The proposed drilling program extends into 1998. Calumet proposes to drill 10 wells continuously in Raccoon Point and mobilize a second rig to drill four wells at Bear Island and two more wells at Pepper Hammock. Calumet will drill all of the wells using existing roads and well pads. The letter of approval for Calumet's Master Plan of Operations for Big Cypress was signed on July 24, 1995. The public comment period ended July 15th. Most amazingly, there were no comments from the public! A recent proposal to drill a single exploration well on adjacent Miccosukee Indian lands aroused all kinds of interest. The Environmental Impact

Statement for Shell Western's Miccosukee well received 425 comment letters that were overwhelmingly "nonsupportive" in nature. Over 350 people (some dressed in panther suits) attended an emotionally charged public hearing on the Miccosukee well. Calumet's plan includes drilling 16 new wells and conducting seismic work with no apparent interest from the local public. Calumet plans to begin drilling this fall at Raccoon Point. Even though the plan approves up to 10 new wells in the field, subsequent drilling will depend heavily on early successes. (O'Dell)