



MINING AND MINERALS BRANCH
Land Resources Division - WASO
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GENERAL

Abandoned Mine Issue Gets Attention In Congressional Hearing

- On August 5, 1993, Assistant Secretary Bob Armstrong testified before the House Natural Resources Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee and the Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee on a hearing investigating unreclaimed hardrock mines on federal lands. The NPS provided written testimony which focused on the ongoing AML inventory and other actions to reclaim hardrock sites in the National Park System. Assistant Secretary Armstrong opened his testimony commending the NPS for its work in addressing the AML issue. A significant portion of the discussion was devoted to the concept of a "Reclamation Fee" assessed on all hardrock mines, federal, state and private for the purpose of reclaiming abandoned mines. A similar concept is currently employed under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) for reclaiming abandoned coal mines. Other witnesses included the Western Governors Association, American Mining Congress, Government Accounting Office, Acting Inspector General of the Department of Interior, the Mineral Policy Center and others. The presence of Congressmen Rahall and Miller at the hearings indicates the attention currently being directed toward this issue. (Bates, Higgins)

Parks and Regions Help Establish Material Extraction Policy

- Mining and Minerals Branch staff have completed a servicewide survey to solicit park issues and answers regarding the

administrative extraction of mineral materials within park boundaries. Thirty four interviews were conducted and eleven parks, three regions and Denver Service Center participated in the survey. The goal of the survey was to assure that any proposed revisions to mineral policy and guidance will provide the parks with the tools they need to deal with mineral material issues and problems. The results of the survey and a list of action items will be the subject of a white paper due to be completed this fall. (Ziegenbein, Geniac, Olsen, Smith, Steensen)

NPS Seeks Additional Funding, Sets Up Bureau of Mines Field Tour

- Branch staff and the Mining and Minerals Division of the Alaska Regional Office accompanied Bureau of Mines (BOM) staff on a tour of abandoned mines in Denali and Wrangell-St. Elias. The field visit was to identify potential research projects for BOM to perform at a variety of abandoned mine sites that seriously impact park resources. Under the memorandum of understanding between the NPS and the BOM, the BOM is undertaking projects to conduct environmental assessments and prepare reclamation designs for abandoned mine sites in NPS units. (Smith, Ziegenbein)

Western Governors' Association Begins Hazardous Site Cleanup Effort

- Branch staff participated in the 1-day meeting of the Western Governors' "Mine Waste Working Group Committee to Develop On-Site Innovative Technologies." Discussions focused on site problems and technology, identifying potential

demonstration projects, and public involvement. It does not appear that the program will result in a demonstration cleanup in any park units. However, the learning experience of multi-agency participation and public environmental groups has been very positive. (Cloues)

Bureau of Mines Requests Handbook Review -

A technical review of the BOM's draft "Abandoned Mine Land Inventory and Hazard Evaluation Handbook" was very positive. The handbook is intended for use by land management and other agencies that are attempting to mitigate abandoned mine land environmental and public safety hazards. The document contains similar information to the NPS "Handbook for the Remediation of Abandoned Mine Lands" made available in 1992 by the branch. However, the BOM draft concentrates on inventory data collection and does not cover remediation and cost estimation. Upon completion, it will provide an excellent reference source for those unfamiliar with mining and mineral processing. (Cloues)

ALASKA REGION

Glacier Bay National Park Prepares for Mine Cleanup

- Staff assisted the Alaska Regional Office and park staff to order and deliver mine closure supplies (e.g., cement, drain pipe, vent pipe, etc.) for a site clean-up project scheduled for this fall, weather permitting. The goal is to deliver supplies so that five abandoned mine openings can be closed in 1994 to minimize visitor safety concerns. The old gold mine is a favorite hiking destination for kayakers. Rotting timber supports, weak ladders between levels in the mine, and loose rock present hazards to unsuspecting adventurers and will be rendered inaccessible through the closure action. The proactive response to the hazards demonstrates management's understanding and concern with a significant problem. (Cloues)

MIDWEST REGION

Cuyahoga Valley Still Plugging Away With the Help of the State

- The state of Ohio has a

matching fund program for the purpose of plugging and reclaiming "orphaned" oil and gas wells where no responsible party can be found. Unfortunately, Cuyahoga Valley has been saddled with a number of the orphaned wells left over from the boom days of petroleum exploration and development. The park and the Mining and Minerals Branch have dedicated limited funds to this reclamation work and the state program makes it possible to stretch those limited funds. Other NPS units may have similar situations where state programs could benefit Park Service minerals management needs through a funding mechanism. If any regions or parks are aware of such programs please contact the Mining and Minerals Branch. (Boucher, Higgins)

PACIFIC NORTHWEST REGION

Mining Proposal Places Olympic Wilderness Beach in Jeopardy

- Branch staff recently advised the region and park on how to best deal with the threat of private mineral exploration and development on Shi-Shi Beach in Olympic. Shi-Shi Beach is legislated wilderness. Branch advice addressed two alternative management approaches: possible NPS condemnation of the mineral estate, and the permitting process required of the operator for mineral exploration purposes. We suggested that through the Special Use Permit (SUP) process, the park/region should require a detailed plan of operations from the operator outlining the proposal including proof of ownership, access means and routes, equipment requirements, dates of operation, reclamation plans, and proof of other necessary state and federal permits. Branch staff prepared a draft letter to send to the potential operator outlining these requirements. If the regional director selects the second alternative and the operator files a proposed plan of operations, the NPS must conduct a thorough review of the plan to assess impacts and determine the mineral exploration compatibility with the wilderness beach and park legislation. The determination of whether to issue a SUP will hinge on this analysis. (Moss, Kassman, Shaver)

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

Mine Closures Completed at Rocky Mountain

- Branch staff served as project manager on a contract to close three abandoned mines in the west unit of Rocky Mountain National Park. The mine openings were located along the Colorado River Trail, a high visitation area as well as proposed wilderness. Two native rock wall bulkheads and one bat gate were installed in the openings. All supplies, including a welder and generator, were packed in on horses. The project was intended to make the mines safe to visitors while preserving the historic character of the area and protecting bat habitat. The mines are a part of the historic Lulu City Mining District which boomed in 1880 when placer silver was discovered in the headwaters of the Colorado River. (Smith)

NPS Evaluates Plan to Leave Uranium Mill Tailing in Place on the Banks of the Colorado River near Moab, Utah

- The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) requested comments on the draft environmental assessment (EA) and finding of no significant impact (FONSI) for remediation of the Atlas Moab Tailings Impoundment located on the Colorado River near Moab, Utah. The NRC's proposed action is to leave the tailings in-place and cover the site with a clay cap to limit radon emissions. The radioactive tailings impoundment, if left in-place adjacent to the river, can erode during high flow events. The release of radioactive material could then adversely impact water quality of the Colorado River in Canyonlands, Glen Canyon, Grand Canyon and Lake Mead. Branch staff assisted NPS Water Quality Division prepare comments on the draft EA. Branch comments addressed the NRC's poor application of the National Environmental Policy Act compliance process by selecting an alternative in the absence of sound scientific information, improper assessment of anticipated environmental impacts, and lack of equal consideration afforded to other viable alternatives (i.e., tailings relocation). The branch also discussed the document's lack of adequate engineering data and indifference to

potential impacts to units of the National Park System. (Moss)

SOUTHWEST REGION

Padre Island Addresses Fresh Water

Contamination - Two oil and gas production sites, one active and one abandoned, on Padre Island have contaminated the shallow fresh water lens in the immediate area of operations. Park staff are overseeing the clean-up of benzene, toluene, and xylene (BETX) at the two sites. In response to the park's request, branch staff provided available information on water quality standards for application to the clean-up projects. Pertinent information obtained from the EPA and NPS Water Quality Division included the current BETX drinking water standards. We advised that aquifers contaminated with BETX can be remediated to established standards, but reducing BETX concentration below the standards becomes increasingly difficult and costly. The branch suggested using bioindicator testing (i.e., expose native biological organisms to varying BETX concentrations to determine effects) and chemical analysis to define appropriate remediation goals. The companies responsible for the contamination should provide the park with a description of water quality and bioindicator testing methods, remediation goals, and remediation techniques to attain such goals, subject to NPS approval. (Geniac)

Sale of Oil Well in Big Thicket Provides Opportunity to Improve Resource Protection -

The NPS nonfederal oil and gas regulations provide that upon a transfer of ownership in an existing operation, the new owner must submit a plan of operations for NPS approval. When Joe Elsbury Corporation sold an oil well to Locin Oil Corporation, Big Thicket staff seized the opportunity to improve the operation. Park staff worked closely with Locin Oil to obtain a new plan that took care of both operating and reclamation deficiencies in the old plan. Branch staff provided suggestions on the proposed plan for handling stormwater runoff and future needs for artificial lift, plugging, and reclamation.

The new plan will increase resource protection through better operating and reclamation requirements. (O'Dell, Boucher)

WESTERN REGION

Mining Operation Proposed at Old Yuma Mine Adjacent to Saguaro - Branch staff reviewed a draft BLM environmental assessment (EA) for a proposed mining operation at the Old Yuma Mine located on lands slated for addition to Saguaro National Monument. The claimant is seeking BLM approval to extract "mineral specimens" from 10 unpatented mining claims (Comet Claim Group). Tucson residents in the area are opposed to the project, largely because the operator proposes to access the claims by helicopter. Comments prepared for the region focused on impact analysis issues and claim validity. The BLM's preferred alternative suggested permitting mining on all claims in the Comet Claim Group. The branch contested this action because BLM and NPS mineral examiners recently declared all but three of these claims invalid due to lack of a discovery. We also noted insufficient analysis of several environmental impact issues, namely air quality, noise, socio-economic, and desert tortoise habitat, and questioned calculation of the claimant's performance bond. The branch suggested that BLM prepare an environmental impact statement due to the large amount of public opposition to the mining operation. (Moss, Covington)

Organ Pipe's Resource Management Plan Sets Example For Addressing Minerals Issues - At the region's request, branch staff evaluated the draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) for Organ Pipe National Monument. The park's primary mineral-related issue is mitigating adverse impacts to natural and cultural resources caused by abandoned mine lands (AML). The branch determined that the RMP properly assessed AML issues and charted a comprehensive management course to mitigate resource impacts. Significant management actions addressed in the RMP include: preparation of an AML Management Plan;

mapping of all AML sites; assessing resource impacts associated with abandoned mines; researching wildlife use of abandoned mines; analyzing mine tailings for contamination problems; developing appropriate reclamation actions; implementing a systematic monitoring program; and producing a multilingual AML brochure to alert visitors to AML safety hazards and to describe the NPS AML program. The RMP also identified the need to prepare and implement a supplemental action plan to properly manage administrative extraction and use of sand and gravel in compliance with Special Directive 91-6, and presented specific actions to improve the park's involvement in adjacent land use planning. The branch commended the park for a job well-done, and suggested that the document be used as a templet for other parks confronted with similar minerals management issues. (Geniac, Burghardt)

Secretary Provided with Recommendation to Visit Orphan Mine Site - It is possible that Secretary Babbitt will be visiting AML sites in the Western Region in the next few months. Although his schedule has not yet been finalized, NPS staff has provided a brief written description of the Orphan Mine site at the Grand Canyon as a possible site for him to visit while he is out west. Although the Secretary was initially going to limit his visits to BLM AML sites, it is hoped that the NPS recommendation will inspire the Secretary to visit a NPS AML site as well. (Bates)