

MINING AND MINERALS BRANCH
Land Resources Division - WASO
Monthly Report - December 1993 and January 1994

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GENERAL

CC:Mail Distribution of Monthly Report - This report inaugurates the use of cc:Mail to distribute monthly activity summary. The cc:Mail address list was prepared from our old mailing list. Few paper copies were mailed. If you received a copy by mail, it means we could not locate a cc:Mail address. Conversely, some parks may receive several cc:Mail copies, because we were uncertain which office wanted the report. We would like to take this opportunity to update our distribution list. Please let us know if you wish to be removed from the address list, or if there is a more appropriate or additional address. Contact Norma Clark on cc:Mail (by name), or at 303-969-2090.

NPS Releases Abandoned Mineral Lands Brochure for Distribution - The year-long team effort to create the NPS abandoned mineral lands (AML) brochure was richly rewarded by the arrival of the first 30,000 copies. The colorful brochure explains the magnitude of the Service's AML problem in terms of safety hazards, environmental impacts, and reclamation needs. The brochure also addresses cultural preservation, interpretation and education opportunities, and outlines restoration strategies including the NPS program of volunteer and cooperative projects. The Branch is distributing copies of the brochure Servicewide and to other Federal land management agencies, State AML program offices, and industry groups involved in AML reclamation. The brochure will help focus Congressional attention on the need for a permanent funding source for AML reclamation under revisions to the 1872 Mining Law. (Wood, Higgins)

Branch Notifies Parks and Regions of External Agency Planning Efforts - To alert NPS managers about minerals-related external land use planning and stimulate early involvement in the process, we provided all regional offices and 75 affected parks with information on adjacent land use planning efforts by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the United States Forest Service (USFS). We stressed the importance of sharing resource data and discussing park issues with adjacent land managers during project scoping. Experience shows that once a preferred alternative is selected, NPS efforts to amend plans to ensure park protection are met with limited success. In contrast, these agencies are generally responsive to concerns raised early in the planning process and supported with applicable information and data. We will relay revised planning schedules to parks and regions as they become available. (O'Dell)

Branch Shares Mineral Appraisal Information with U.S. Forest Service - We recently provided a staff prepared generic mineral appraisal contract and a current list of mineral appraisers to Jefferson National Forest in Virginia. Forest staff requested the information to assist in searching for a qualified contractor. This exchange of information will enhance the uniformity and consistency in obtaining mineral appraisals acceptable by the mineral owner and the U.S. Government. The opportunity to arrive at fair market

value, no more and no less, is increased when all factors affecting value are properly considered through uniform guidelines. (Cloues)

Departmental Task Force Looks at Hazardous Materials and AML Sites - Branch staff attended the Department of the Interior (DOI) Hazardous Materials Inventory Task Force meetings held in Washington, D.C., on December 2, 1993, and January 13, 1994. Participants discussed the goals and objectives of the task force and laid out ideas for developing a specific work plan and task force charter. The task force's primary objective for 1994 is a preliminary inventory of DOI hazmat and abandoned mine sites and order-of-magnitude cleanup cost estimates for Departmental lands. This task will require development of definitions, identification and query of existing data sources, and data integration. After this phase is completed in September, the task force will develop a plan for field data collection and coordinate with the bureaus to ensure that the data is collected. The optimistic goal of the task force leader is to gather all the field data by the end of 1995. The BLM and the USFS have much later agency goals for this task - 1997 or 1998. The NPS AML database may already contain enough information to satisfy the task force needs. The task force is important because this coordinated effort may result in a departmental process to allocate funding to the agencies for mitigation and cleanup. (Higgins)

BLM May Review Its Oil and Gas Program - The BLM Colorado State Office invited Branch staff to attend a briefing in Denver by BLM WASO personnel. The briefing, one of several in the western states, addressed a possible review of the BLM's oil and gas program. Pete Hart, Superintendent at Theodore Roosevelt, attended a similar meeting in Billings, Montana. Other attendees included USFS and EPA staff and a large contingent of industry representatives. The briefing did not define exactly what aspects of the oil and gas program were going to be reviewed and for what purpose. Branch staff and Pete Hart made a point of requesting that NPS/BLM trans-boundary issues be addressed in any review. The Branch will provide more details as they become available. (Heise, O'Dell)

Simon Says, No Go: NPCA Funding of AML Projects in Parks Put on Hold - Dave Simon, Southwest Regional Director for the National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA), recently solicited proposals from the NPS for abandoned mineral lands (AML) projects not to exceed \$5,000. Several parks and the Western and Southwest Regional Offices responded by submitting proposals for the funding. Project proposals included "seed money" for a HABS/HAER study of the Mariscal Mine in Big Bend and backfilling of a mine shaft in Lake Mead. Unfortunately, the NPCA funding was allocated to another project shortly after Mr. Simon received the NPS proposals. He has saved the NPS proposals and anticipates other opportunities to make disbursements in the future. Park managers in Texas, New Mexico, or Arizona that wish to submit proposals for future NPCA funding should contact the Branch. (Burghardt)

MIDWEST REGION

Director Request's BLM Action to Address Lead Mining Near Ozark Riverways - Director Kennedy sent a memorandum to the BLM Director raising concerns about BLM permitting of lead exploration near Ozark. The exploration and mine development have the potential to seriously affect water quality and quantity in the park. The Director's memo transmitted the branch's analysis of the BLM's apparent extralegal conduct related to exploration by the Doe Run Company in the Mark Twain National Forest near Ozark. Essentially, our analysis concluded that the BLM allowed Doe Run to conduct drilling lands without first obtaining a prospecting permit as required under BLM leasing regulations. The memo requested that BLM halt the drilling and withhold issuance of new permits pending more definitive hydrology information. The Missouri Coalition for the Environment, a grassroots environmental group, also recently filed a formal request to Secretary Babbitt for "an immediate halt to these illegal operations on federal public lands." (Kassman)

Branch Assists Indiana Dunes Mineral Material Appraisal - The Chief Appraiser, Midwest Region, requested assistance on a mineral materials appraisal at Indiana Dunes. The appraisal is in the planning, information gathering, and contract development stage. Branch staff supplied a generic mineral appraisal contract for reference and three recent mineral evaluation technical articles pertaining to preparation of a defensible appraisal at fair market value. Branch staff remain committed to providing mineral economic assistance in appraisal development, as well as appraisal review. Mineral appraisals are often dependent on recovery rates, current prices, expected trends, geologic interpretation, resource and reserve calculations, taxes, capital investment, mining methods, overburden thicknesses, and many other parameters affecting income generation. (Cloues)

Abandoned Gas Well Plugged at James A. Garfield - Branch staff provided oversight during the plugging of an abandoned oil and gas well at James A. Garfield. The well was drilled by the former President of the United States in the late 1800s to a depth of 875 feet. Initially, the well produced sufficient quantities of gas to light and heat the President's house. When the reservoir was depleted, the well was left open and posed a safety hazard and potential threat to subsurface water quality. Old wells such as this one may have less than adequate well-casing integrity which can allow for cross communication and contamination of aquifers. The plugging entailed filling the wellbore with more than 150 sacks of Class A cement, permanently sealing this bore. The wellhead was cut below the surface and a metal plate was welded to the surface casing. (Boucher)

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

Controversial New World Mine Site Near Yellowstone Could Go Superfund - The abandoned McLaren and Como open pit mines, along with the historic McLaren mine tailings near Yellowstone, were recently nominated to the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) list for consideration as a National Priority List (NPL) site under Superfund. Crown Butte Mining, Hemlo Gold, and Noranda, the three partner companies involved in the New World mining venture adjacent to Yellowstone, own the two open pit mines at the recently listed "Henderson Mountain Site." The EPA has selected a contractor to perform the preliminary assessment (PA) on the property. Information gathered in the PA will allow the EPA to determine if the Henderson Mountain Site qualifies for Superfund status. Since applying for their permit to mine, the companies have been besieged by vocal environmental groups, political pressure, a Clean Water Act based lawsuit, and now the CERCLA listing. Each of these issues makes mining near Yellowstone more difficult and expensive for the companies. Stay tuned for further details on how, or if, this listing will affect the proposed gold mine now in the environmental impact statement process. (Moss)

Virginia City: Potential Liabilities and Hazards? - Branch staff commented on the task directive for the Virginia City Special Resource Study, an assessment of various management alternatives for Virginia City, Montana, an historic mining site. Our comments noted that mining techniques (i.e., mercury amalgamation) used during the turn of the century may have resulted in "pools" of mercury in the tailings piles. Disturbance or release of mercury pools is a critical health and environmental protection issue. Because of this concern and potential liability under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), we suggested that the study team perform a hazardous material survey of the area to document presence and concentration of mercury. Comments also suggested that the study address additional issues, such as resource impacts associated with maintaining an historic devastated landscape, impacts from internal and external abandoned mineral land reclamation, and potential future mining operations in the study area and on adjacent lands. (Geniac)

Abandoned Mine Reclamation Projects Planned for Arches and Capitol Reef - Branch and park staff met with a representative from the Utah Division of Oil, Gas, and Mining (UDOGM) to plan closure and reclamation work for two abandoned mine shafts in the Salt Creek drainage at Arches and twelve portals at the Rainy Day Mine in Capitol Reef. The site meetings were held to collect final dimensions and to reach consensus on mitigation methods. UDOGM intends to award contracts for mitigation and reclamation work during FY 1994 for up to a total of \$35,000. The Branch and park staff will provide direction and oversight during the projects. (Burghardt, Wood)

Branch Reviews Seismic Proposal at Canyonlands - At the superintendent's request, branch staff reviewed a proposal from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) and the University of Nevada, Reno, to conduct seismic operations in the vicinity of Upheaval Dome in Canyonlands. The origin of this geological oddity has been debated for years in the scientific community. One group believes the dome results from underlying salt flowage, the other group holds that the feature reflects an ancient meteorite impact crater. By imaging the underlying strata, the JPL hopes to resolve the question. Rather than utilize conventional seismic acquisition techniques, JPL proposes to use a low-weight, low-energy technology to minimize the impact of the study. After speaking with both JPL and university scientists, the Branch determined that the proposed methodology posed no threat to park resources. (Heise)

SOUTHWEST REGION

Carlsbad Cavern's Lechuguilla Cave Protected in BLM Final Environmental Impact Statement - The BLM's Dark Canyon Oil and Gas Leasing Final EIS has as its preferred alternative a "cave protection zone" on BLM lands immediately north of Carlsbad Cavern to protect Lechuguilla Cave. Alternatives originally proposed in the draft EIS would have, in the opinion of the NPS and speleologists from around the world, inadequately protected cave resources from irreparable damage. The park and Southwest Regional Office assembled a task force comprised of Capitan Reef experts from the scientific community and industry to define a scientifically defensible cave protection zone around the Lechuguilla Cave area based on geology and hydrology. The task force report was instrumental in the development of a new alternative by the BLM that would adequately protect this world class resource. Protective measures included prohibiting future drilling in the protection zone and application of cave protection plugging stipulations to existing wells in the zone. The proposed action also calls for compensation to existing leases "taken" by such action. The Branch was involved in suggesting and reviewing proposed drilling techniques that would minimize the risk to cave resources. (Heise)

Branch Evaluates Proposed Oil and Gas Well at Padre Island - Branch staff evaluated a plan of operations proposed by Bright and Company (Bright) for drilling the Dunn McCampbell #1 exploration oil and gas well in Padre Island. Park personnel, to their credit, worked closely with Bright to develop a well organized and comprehensive plan of operations. The Branch provided comments to the region and park concerning access road construction, water quality monitoring, and other technical aspects of the proposed operations. With a few information additions, the plan is expected to provide excellent resource protection while allowing Bright to exercise their nonfederal oil and gas rights. (O'Dell, Boucher)

WESTERN REGION

Nevada Triangle Study Analyzes Abandoned Mine Data Sources - The Nevada Triangle portion of Death Valley was used as a model to assess and document the variance between available abandoned mineral land (AML) information sources and what is actually found in the field. Branch staff reviewed

the available literature, aerial photography, databases, and maps of the Nevada Triangle to ascertain the number and location of AML sites. Staff then followed up with a field survey of the area and compared results. This study was necessary to plan for the management of some 3 million acres that may be added to the System by the proposed California Desert Protection Act, which preliminary studies indicate are encumbered with 5,000-6,000 AML features. A detailed paper discussing the findings and optimum inventory strategies is forthcoming. This project also provided information that will be useful for participating with other Nevada land managing agencies in a cooperative effort to address AML. (Burghardt, Wood)

Interagency Inventory of AML Sites Initiated in Nevada - Branch staff participated in a meeting at the BLM Nevada State Office to discuss interagency efforts to inventory AML sites in the state. Over 50 representatives from the BLM, USFS, USGS, NPS, USFWS, BOM, BIA, Nevada Department of Minerals, Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology, Nevada Mining Association, and Sierra Club attended the meeting. The BLM is directing the cooperative effort to complete a comprehensive automated inventory of AML sites on all federal, state, and private lands in Nevada by September 30, 1997. BLM convened the meeting to solicit the participation and input of various land managers and other interested parties. The NPS administers approximately 775,000 acres in Nevada, comprised of Great Basin, Lake Mead, and Death Valley. The NPS has the most complete AML inventory compared to other Federal land management agencies in Nevada. All three of the NPS units in the state have abandoned mines on federally owned lands, and inactive and abandoned mines on patented and unpatented mining claims. The Branch will continue tracking the state-wide inventory effort, which may in time attract funding for mitigation. (Burghardt)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Branch Staff Attend Conference on Tailings and Mine Waste - Branch staff recently attended the industry sponsored Conference on Tailings and Mine Waste in Ft. Collins, Colorado. The conference highlighted new technologies in mining, waste reduction, tailings containment, hazardous substance testing, and acid drainage remediation. Conference speakers also discussed how to work in the regulatory framework in an effort to avoid liabilities associated with the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act. Knowledge gained from this conference will enable Branch staff to better understand the position and actions of private industry when dealing with or regulating solid mineral operations. (Moss, Ziegenbein)

Staff Attend Petro-Safe '94 Conference and Exhibition - Branch staff attended a 3-day conference discussing advanced technologies and innovative techniques for handling problems associated with oil and gas activities in areas with high environmental standards. The course covered such topics as monitoring of drilling fluids toxicity, bioremediation of hydrocarbon spills, conversion of oil field-produced water into potable water, and environmentally beneficial reuse of drilling waste. Course materials updated staff understanding of advanced environmental technology. (Boucher)