



**MINING AND MINERALS BRANCH**  
**Land Resources Division - WASO**  
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**GENERAL**

**Branch Staff Requests Planning Information -**

The Branch staff sent memorandums and data to each region requesting an update on NPS plans needing the Branch's attention to address mineral management issues. This information is important in the Branch's compilation of the 1994 workplan. Parks and regions will likely receive priority on all plans identified. (Geniac)

**Training Opportunities Abundant -**

Branch staff informed regional training officers, mineral coordinators, and the DSC of a list of vendors providing minerals-related training. Vendors include government, industry, and universities. To date, 28 copies have been sent to parks, regions, and DSC staff. The Branch continues to solicit information to keep the list current. (Geniac)

**Mineral Appraisal Course Given to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service -**

A 2-day course was successfully presented to 48 USFWS appraisers and two NPS Lands Division appraisers in McAllen, Texas by Mining and Minerals Branch staff. The course was part of a 5-day training session held in the Service's most active acquisition area and was designed to improve the ability to purchase mineral rights at fair market value. A better understanding of the geology, mining methods, environmental mitigation, laws governing exploration and development, and appraisal methodology will contribute to consistent defensible values which will protect the property rights of the individual or company and the pockets of the taxpayer. Appraisal

uniformity between federal agencies will help prevent inflated values from unjustly altering those existing in the market place. (Cloues)

**NORTH ATLANTIC REGION**

**Director Kennedy Responds To Criticism Regarding Mining Near Saratoga National Historical Park -**

The office of the Director requested Branch assistance in responding to allegations that Saratoga National Historical Park was not adequately protecting park resources from a mining operation proposed outside the park. Mrs. Janet Stewart, representing a local organization called Save Easton Environment, requested that the Director conduct a "... complete investigation of the true impacts of this mining and quarrying project ..." Mrs. Stewart implied that the state permitting agency and the park superintendent were negligent in their approach to the permitting of this operation. The Branch staff reviewed the extensive case file submitted by Mrs. Stewart and interviewed representatives from Saratoga, the North Atlantic Regional Office, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. We found the following items during the review and included them in the draft response letter from the Director:

- \* The proposed mining operation was 3 to 6 miles from the park. The park had no authority to regulate the operation.
- \* The only impacts to the park were visual impacts. The park has the same right as any citizen of the United States to

submit comments and concerns to the state permitting agency.

- \* The park has actively participated in the permitting process from late 1990 to the present. Their participation resulted in the addition of significant visual mitigations to the state permit and reduced the visual impacts to the park.
- \* The only remaining mitigation would be denial of the state's mining permit.

The Director's letter concludes with the following: "We share your concern for the protection of the historic scene at Saratoga National Historic Park and hope you will continue to work with us in monitoring this operation if the permit should be issued. Together, we may best protect our national heritage within the limits provided by State and Federal law." (Ziegenbein, Shaver)

**Sand and Gravel Reclamation Recommendations for Acadia** - Twelve sand and gravel pits in Acadia cause negative resource effects. Common problems include sparse revegetation, exotic species growth, safety risks, and visual impacts. The sites originally supplied sand, gravel, and rock materials for roads on Mt. Desert Island, including many historically significant stone bridges and carriage roads. With help from Acadia, staff found six sites that will benefit from reclamation work. Approaches include reducing soil compaction, shaping sites to blend with surrounding lands, constructing control measures to disperse storm water runoff, and planting trees or using mulch. With reclamation designed for site conditions, such work will speed long-term site recovery. (Steensen)

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

**Critical Concerns Over Grand Teton National Park's Sand And Gravel Plans Environmental Assessment** - Branch staff reviewed an EA examining the impacts of a park-wide plan for both internal and external extraction of mineral materials. The EA acknowledged that much of

the information necessary to do a complete environmental analysis is not available. The Branch agreed and listed this, along with several other reasons, as the basis for a recommendation to perform a complete EIS rather than an EA. An EIS could be tiered, allowing individual site analysis, a technique not permitted with an EA. The Branch also recommended a full EIS on grounds relating to controversy, inability to predict impacts to threatened or endangered species, and the belief that this document set a precedent. The document noted that several of the proposed extraction sites would be in view of visitors. Viewshed degradation is contrary to NPS Management Policy. The Branch was unable to determine if the proposal would meet other related NPS policies. (Geniac, Steensen)

**New World Environmental Impact Statement Alternatives Identified** - Branch staff identified several alternatives worthy of analysis in the upcoming EIS for the proposed New World gold mine adjacent to Yellowstone National Park. Alternatives submitted for analysis include the following:

- \* Submitting the project for analysis by the Western Governors' "Demonstration of On-site Innovative Technologies" (DOIT) committee;
- \* Install pyrite removal circuit to isolate acid forming materials from the tailings;
- \* High pressure underground fracture grouting to protect groundwater;
- \* Offsite and other alternate site tailings disposal considering underground conveyance of tailings; and,
- \* Complete removal of the McLaren tailings and restoration of the riparian zone along Soda Butte Creek.

All NPS alternatives were well received by the lead agencies with a promise to analyze and consider fully each alternative in the EIS. (Moss, Cloues, Woods, Higgins)

**Branch Briefs USFS Washington Office On Adjacent Activities At Theodore Roosevelt**

**National Park** - To follow up earlier meetings with the BLM and the USFS Washington offices, the Branch provided a briefing letter to Bruce Ramsey, Fluid Mineral Specialist, in the USFS Washington office. The letter reviewed the history of adjacent oil and gas operations at Theodore Roosevelt, the leasing EIS, and the NPS position that USFS visual quality guidelines had not been followed. Coincident with the letter, Theodore Roosevelt staff set a meeting date with the USFS planners responsible for assigning visual quality categories to USFS lands within the park's viewshed. With attention now focused at both the local and Washington levels, we anticipate some sort of resolution of this long-standing issue. (Heise)

**Branch And Dinosaur National Monument Optimistic On Early Involvement In New BLM Resource Management Plan** - At the request of Dinosaur, the Branch reviewed oil and gas leasing stipulations in the preliminary draft RMP for the BLM's White River Resource Area. The resource area approached the park early in their preparation process to identify park concerns. The Branch suggested requesting surface use and timing restrictions along the southern boundary of the park. We also suggested that the BLM designate the easement along the Harpers Corner Road as a discretionary no lease/closure area. More important, the Branch and Dinosaur are optimistic that the Resource Area's request for NPS involvement so early in the process indicates a high likelihood that the park's concerns will be met. (Heise, Boucher)

## **SOUTHEAST REGION**

**Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area's EA Optional** - The Branch reviewed an EA examining the impacts from a proposed operation to extract riverbed gravel inside the park's boundary. The Branch staff suggested broadening the EA to include three alternatives as follows:

- \* no action;

- \* allow extraction as proposed; or
- \* allow extraction with stipulations.

The plan of operations and the EA lacked much of the information required to analyze the entire project, such as hydrologic impacts, reclamation, and monitoring techniques. The analysis will also require additional information from the operator, the state, and the Corps of Engineers (who will also write an EA and issue permits). The Branch noted that the National Environmental Policy Act allows the NPS to be a cooperating agency on an EA, to adopt another Federal agency's EA, or amend such an EA. Chattahoochee may decide that adoption of one of the other agency's EAs is more appropriate in this case. (Geniac)

**Operator Plans Gas Storage Project In Big South Fork National Recreation Area** - Saint Joseph Petroleum is testing the regulatory waters for converting its producing gas field into a gas storage project. The field is mostly inside the boundary of Big South Fork on both private and Federal mineral estates. Saint Joseph would purchase gas from other sources and inject gas into the wells during the summer when demand is low. The wells would be produced during the peak demand winter months. The company profits by selling gas at a higher price during peak demand times. The Branch's review of Saint Joseph's proposal first questions whether Saint Joseph Petroleum has the right to conduct gas storage operations. The six gas wells operated by Saint Joseph Petroleum are on Federal surface acreage but with private oil gas rights. Whether gas storage is a right retained by private mineral interests in a split estate is unclear. If Saint Joseph Petroleum does possess rights to store gas underground in Big South Fork, the BLM would be responsible for administering and protecting adjacent Federal mineral rights. The NPS must consent for any gas storage contract or unit agreement. In short, the regulatory waters for gas storage at Big South Fork may be too cold for swimming. (O'Dell)

## **SOUTHWEST REGION**

**Pipeline Through Big Thicket National Preserve Close To Plan Of Operations Approval** - Chevron Pipe Line Company operates the West Texas Gulf Pipeline that carries crude oil through the Lance Rosier and Menard Creek Corridor Units of the Big Thicket National Preserve. The Branch recently evaluated Chevron Pipe Line's proposed plan. The Branch's comments on the plan suggested inclusion or clarification on several items that should enhance environmental protection and the NPS's ability to administer and regulate the pipeline operations. (O'Dell)

## **WESTERN REGION**

**Briggs Gold Mine DEIS Big On Size But Little In Content** - The Branch staff submitted comments to the Western Region on the Briggs Gold Mine DEIS. The proposed open pit, cyanide heap leach operation is adjacent to Death Valley National Monument. The Briggs DEIS did not consider fully the environmental impacts of their actions, explore alternative courses of action, or identify steps to mitigate environmental damage. The Briggs DEIS extensively used discussions of alternatives as a forum for attempting to prove that economics must be the deciding factor in mine design and operation. Along with citing the lack of substantive impact and alternative discussion, the Branch staff also flagged many information deficiencies and blatant engineering problems. A sampling of concerns includes locating the mine and facilities in an active alluvial valley, placing the cyanide heap 200 feet from a major fault line, surface flow disruption, ground water flow disruption and contamination, and conflicts with Wilderness Study Area designations and park values. The document was a preliminary draft. The Branch is hopeful that the next draft will improve. (Moss, Covington)

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**The First Western Surface Mining Exhibition & Conference Held in Denver** - The conference was attended by staff interested in the various programs dealing with reclamation and environmental strategies, mining methods and planning, mineral policy, legislation, and public lands issues. The conference was sponsored by Maclean Hunter Presentations, Inc. (the publisher of "Coal," "Engineering and Mining Journal," and "Rock Products" trade journals). The exhibits provided some new innovative technologies which will have application in protecting Park Service resources from undue degradation and impacts from mining operations both past and future. (Cloues, et al)

**Two Abandoned Mineral Land Conferences Attended** - Branch staff attended two meetings on the national abandoned mineral lands (AML) inventory: *Inactive and Abandoned Hardrock Mine Waste: A Challenge for the '90's* sponsored by the Colorado Center for Environmental Management, and the Western Governors' Association Mine Waste Task Force. The purpose of the first was to discuss the current status of abandoned mined land clean-up efforts in the nation, and how participants can influence emerging remedial programs. Attendees included representatives from federal and state government, industry, and the environmental community. The purpose of the second was to discuss the need for and the mechanism to create a national AML inventory and data base. Staff attended to: ensure the NPS viewpoint on the allocation of hardrock AML funds was represented; facilitate federal/state cooperation and interaction on AML inventory and mitigation; and, ensure that any national inventory that is developed is compatible with the NPS AML inventory and will not commit the NPS to additional (and, most probably, unnecessary) inventory efforts. (Smith, Higgins)