



*U.S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
Natural Resource Information Division*



*Fact Sheet*

## Mineral, Oil, and Gas Extractions Adjacent to National Park System Units

October 1997

97-36

The frequency of mineral development adjacent to units of the National Park System<sup>1</sup> is increasing because mining and oil and gas developers are moving into new territories. The multiple use missions of other federal land management agencies such as the US Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management often give greater priority to resource extraction than to recreation or conservation. Because the effects of resource extraction cross boundaries, they complicate the strict mandate of the National Park Service to conserve natural and cultural resources for all future generations. The service possesses no agency specific regulatory tools that allow park managers to stipulate or regulate potentially harmful mineral extraction adjacent to park lands. Currently, mining is conducted adjacent to 51 units and oil and gas are extracted adjacent to 35 units.

### Adverse Effects of Adjacent Mineral Development

Adverse effects on natural and cultural resources from mining and from oil and gas development are numerous. For

example, ground and surface waters can be contaminated with heavy metals that leach and acids that drain from mineral mines or with chemicals or hydrocarbons from drilling operations. Erosion of sensitive lands may be excessive, and siltation of downstream waters is frequent. Mineral development adjacent to units can introduce exotic plant species, reduce important wildlife habitat, displace wildlife, cause visual intrusion, impair night skies, provide a source of excessive noise and noxious odors, and reduce air quality with airborne pollutants or fugitive dust. Also, of particular concern are visitor safety and overall degradation of the visitors' experience.

### Position of the National Park Service

The National Park Service has aggressively pursued protection of its resources from adjacent mineral development by attempting to coordinate mineral planning and permitting by adjacent land managers. Although many attempts of early intervention in the planning of mineral extraction and in the permitting process have been only marginally successful, some elicited fine interagency cooperation. For example:

- **Yellowstone National Park.** The National Park Service was included in the permitting process of the New World mine by the state of Montana and the Gallatin National Forest and was also a designated cooperating agency in the environmental impact statement process. This early and intense involvement resulted in an announcement by the President in August 1996 that the United States and the Crown Butte Mining corporation had agreed with a federal buy-out of the company's New World mine holdings to protect the fragile Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. In October 1997, House and Senate negotiators provided funding specifically for the acquisition of the New World mine holdings.

- **Carlsbad Caverns National Park.** The National Park Service worked with the Bureau of Land Management to locate exploratory oil and gas wells in an area that would not damage sensitive resources in the Lechigulla Cave area.

- **Gulf Islands National Seashore.** The state of Mississippi indefinitely postponed the leasing of offshore oil and gas tracts adjacent to Gulf Islands National Seashore after taking into account the concerns of the National Park Service with viewshed protection

<sup>1</sup> National parks and other entities of the National Park Service such as national monuments, national rivers, wild and scenic riverways, national scenic trails, and others are called *units* and collectively constitute the *National Park System*.

and with receiving a large amount of public opposition to the plan.

- **Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.** The National Park Service provided the Office of Surface Mining with extensive resource-related data for the *lands unsuitable* determination in the environmental impact statement for the proposed surface coal mine by Appolo Fuels in the Tennessee portion of the Little Yellow Creek watershed above the park. Under the provisions of Section 522(c) of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977, which prohibits surface coal mining in the Tennessee portion of the Little Yellow Creek watershed, the Office of Surface Mining deemed the study area unsuitable for surface coal mining.

Proposed or ongoing oil and gas development or mineral extraction over which the National Park Service has yet to come to agreement with adjacent land management agencies to fully protect park resources include:

- **Theodore Roosevelt National Park.** Adjacent oil and gas development continues to intrude upon aesthetics. The Bureau of Land Management granted the service little involvement in the planning and permitting of the development.

- **Ozark National Scenic Riverway.** Exploration for and possible mining of federally leased lead deposits are

imminent in the Mark Twain National Forest. Mining of deep lead deposits may threaten the quality and quantity of natural ground water flow that is the primary contributor to the extraordinary springs for which the park was created. Involvement of the National Park Service in the exploration permitting process and requests by the service for more study of possible adverse effects on aquifers from exploration and mining have met with minimal success.

- **Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.** Although the Tennessee portion of the park's historical scene as viewed from the Pinnacle overlook was protected by the *lands unsuitable* decision by the United States Office of Surface Mining (discussed above), efforts by the park to protect an even closer portion of the viewshed from yet another proposed Appolo Fuels surface coal mining in Kentucky have not been as successful. To date, the service has not been able to convince the state permitting agency that surface coal mining, only 2 miles from the park boundary, has adverse effects on the park's scenic values and is a violation of state regulations. The regulations require consent by the National Park Service to any surface-coal mining that adversely affects park lands.

Although land management agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service, and various states are required to entertain mineral development proposals, the

National Park Service seeks the opportunity to provide suggestions that protect public park lands from adjacent mineral development. The service contends that mining and other mineral extraction are irretrievable commitments of resources that conflict with a conservation mandate. As supported by evidence, mineral production under even the most stringent permitting standards can sometimes cause unacceptable degrees of resource degradation.

The National Park Service continues to aggressively pursue early involvement in adjacent mineral planning and permitting issues while taking into consideration the multiple use mandate of adjacent land managers and the private property rights by adjacent property owners. Early intervention could effect environmentally friendlier mineral operations without disrespect for the multiple use of adjacent lands or private property rights.

**For further information contact:**

Kerry Moss  
National Park Service  
Geologic Resources Division  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, CO 80225  
e-mail: [kerry\\_moss@nps.gov](mailto:kerry_moss@nps.gov)