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DOUGLAS F. DAY  
Director

DIVISION OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

1596 West North Temple/Salt Lake City, Utah 84116/801-533-9333

April 13, 1981

Reply To SOUTHEASTERN REGIONAL OFFICE  
455 West Railroad Avenue, Box 840, Price, Utah 84501  
(801) 637-3310

Mr. Floyd Tucker, General Manager  
Plateau Mining Company  
Star Point Mines  
P.O. Drawer PMC  
Price, Utah 84501

Attention: Ben Grimes

Dear Floyd:

In response to your request for the Division to evaluate the now existing overland conveyor as it relates to movement of wildlife, the following comments are offered. As you know there has been a concern in the professional biological community relative to the potential impacts the conveyor could have on the movement of mule deer. Since the conveyor alignment is such that it parallels the general direction of the deer's migration movement, the Division's concern is only for lateral movement within Wattis Canyon.

Generally speaking, the conveyor lies within a low elevation area of the high-priority summer range on herd unit 33. High-priority valued winter range lies immediately east of the terminal end of the conveyor. The majority of use that this summer range area receives by deer is during the spring and fall migration periods. It should be noted, however, that some deer do reside in Wattis Canyon during the summer period (May 16 through October 31) and that the south facing exposure of the Canyon does support some deer during most winters (November 1 through May 15). There is also evidence that wintering deer do make some use of the north facing exposure of Wattis Canyon. Thus, the demonstrated use by deer is such that they have need to cross the conveyor on a daily basis during all seasons of most years.

Throughout the 1980-1981 winter the Division has solicited candid comments from persons associated with the mine concerning their observations of deer use in relation to the conveyor. There has been one instance (November 1980) of a mature doe with twin fawns jumping the conveyor and numerous instances where deer have crawled underneath the conveyor in order to move across Wattis Canyon. One observer commented that a spike buck crawled under the conveyor at a point where it was so low to the ground that he was concerned the animal would "get stuck". An immediate inspection on the observer's part showed that the deer had safely passed. The reported observations of deer crossings include situations where deer had been startled by the presence of man and also situations where deer crossed seemingly unaware of the observer. Crossings have also been noted during periods when the conveyor was in operation as well as when it was idle.

From the comments received and Larry Dalton's inspections of the conveyor system in relation to local habitats, it seems obvious that deer are capable of passing

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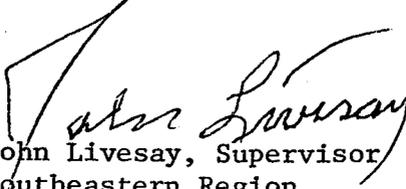
Mr. Floyd Tucker, General Manager

to either side of the conveyor. As you know, there are three major areas where the terrain and vegetation are such that a deer would be expected to attempt a crossing. It is in these same areas where most observers have noted use by deer. The bottom of the conveyor along all of these areas is about one meter from the ground. It is important to note that along much of the conveyor system there exists similar areas of clearance.

The Division's opinion is that the existing overland conveyor does not represent a barrier to migration or daily movements of mule deer. It is recommended that snow removal from the maintenance road that lies adjacent to the conveyor be accomplished in such a manner that snow is not wind-rows along the conveyor. Such a condition could temporarily preclude passage of deer. The planting of browse and tree species along with the existing grass-forb seeding adjacent to the areas where most deer crossings are observed could enhance deer use of the area. Accomplishment of this recommendation could result in an improved travelway for the deer. It is believed that the preferred crossing areas would be enhanced if there was more clearance between the bottom of the conveyor and the ground. As you pointed out, the Company will create some additional clearance by jacking-up the conveyor along areas where it has settled. Possibly, additional benefits or enhancement could be realized if 12 to 18 inches of soil was removed from beneath the conveyor at the preferred crossing areas.

Thank you for the Company's concern for Utah's wildlife resources. If the Division can be of any further service please coordinate with Larry Dalton as appropriate.

Sincerely,

  
John Livesay, Supervisor  
Southeastern Region

JL:LBD:gp

cc: Darrell Nish  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Division Oil, Gas and Mining ✓  
Bureau of Land Management