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October 7, 1988

TO: John Whitehead, Permit Supervisor

FROM: Brent Stettler, Reclamation Biologist *Brent*

RE: Observations on the North Fork of the Right Fork of
Miller Creek, Plateau Mining Company, Star Point Mine,
ACT/007/006, Folder #2, Carbon County, Utah

On September 28, 1988, Lynn Kunzler and I walked the north fork of the right fork of Miller Creek, which is proposed for undermining in the spring of 1989. Our objectives were to observe conditions generally, and determine if vegetation sampling could be conducted this year. Sampling did not seem worthwhile, considering the phenological decline of vegetation.

The physiognomy of the creek changed with elevation -- a drop of 1000 feet over 6000 feet horizontal distance. The middle reach fell fastest and was characterized by a stair-step of waterfalls; small cliffs and boulders flanked both sides of the creek. Elsewhere, canyon side slopes approached 100%. Upper and lower reaches of the creek exhibited relatively gentle grades, notwithstanding the steepness of channel side slopes.

The stream channel ranged between 6 and 24 inches wide. Water depth was 1 to 4 inches. Water flow appeared to be 10-20 gpm. The riparian zone was narrow, ranging between 8 and 15 feet wide.

The riparian zone along the upper reach was carpeted with forbs, primarily heartleaf bittercress. The middle reach was dominated by willows. Red-osier dogwood and honeysuckle also occurred. Grasses dominated the riparian zone of the lower reach. Agrostis and Poa species predominated. Wheatgrasses were observed to a lesser extent. In general, vegetation appeared typical of other drainages of the Wasatch Plateau. No unusual resources or threatened or endangered species were observed.

Some wildlife use was evident along the creek. Elk and mule deer tracks and trails were encountered along upper and lower reaches. The middle reach sustained less use. Red squirrels were common along the creek. Several beaver dams were present along the lower reach. Avifauna included an unidentified accipiter, chickadees and juncos. No fisheries potential exists. However, beaver dams could potentially provide habitat for trout, if these were planted. Introduction by natural means would not be possible.

If undermining occurs, rubblization of the creek channel may result. Water may also be lost in subsidence cracks. As a consequence, composition of the riparian community would change over time. Ground cover, productivity, and species diversity may be reduced but probably not significantly. A reduction in woody plant density may result from toppling of trees or drouth. The character of the riparian zone and drainage may change, but it is doubtful that it would disappear or significantly impact wildlife or human users.

WPOB37/5