

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA # UT-066-94-33

PRICE RIVER RESOURCE AREA

FILE # 3451#2
Copy Paul (all)PROPOSED ACTION TITLE/TYPE: Readjustment of Federal coal leases U-014217 and U-014218, Intermountain Power Agency, Lessee.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT/CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION:

Under 516 DM 2.3 A(3), mineral lease adjustments or readjustments are categorically excluded from environmental assessments or environmental impact statement preparation. However, Federal coal lease U-014218 is adjacent to the Turtle Canyon Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and partially inside the proposed wilderness area encompassed in House Bill 1500. Under current policy, actions on lands included in H. R. 1500 would receive special attention. Since this is a potentially controversial action, an exception to the categorical exclusion determination is noted and an environmental assessment is required.

CONFORMANCE WITH LAND USE PLAN:

This proposed action is subject to the Price River Resource Management Framework Plan (MFP) as amended. This plan has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the Land Use Plan (LUP) terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5. This action has been found to be in conformance with the MFP Category 1- Open to leasing with standard and special stipulations.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION:

Federal coal leases U-014217 and U-014218, held currently by Intermountain Power Agency, are due for readjustment of their terms and conditions on February 1, 1995. The proposed action is to readjust the leases for another 10 year period and add the standard lease stipulations to the leases as this is the first lease readjustment after 1976 (the passage of the Federal Coal Leasing Amendment Act). These two leases are located about 30 miles southeast of Price, Utah in the Book Cliffs of Emery County (see attached map). The two leases are located in the Book Cliffs Known Recoverable Coal Leasing area and are part of a large lease-holding area often times referred to in the past as the Kaiser South Lease Area. Legal descriptions of the leases follow:

Coal Lease U-014217

- T. 16 S., R. 14 E., SLM, Utah
Sec. 25, SW1/4NE1/4, SE1/4.
- T. 16 S., R. 15 E., SLM, Utah
Sec. 30, Lots 3, 4;
Sec. 31, Lots 1-3, SE1/4NW1/4, NE1/4SW1/4.

Containing 455.84 acres; Emery County

Coal Lease U-014218

- T. 16 S., R. 14 E., SLM, Utah
Sec. 12, E1/2.

Containing 320 acres; Emery County

The surface estate is public land administered by the BLM.

PURPOSE AND NEED OF THE PROPOSED ACTION:

In accordance with 43 CFR 3451.1(a)(1), coal leases issued prior to August 4,

1976, are subject to readjustment of its terms and conditions at the end of the current 20-year lease period and at the end of each 10-year period thereafter. The subject leases were issued on February 1, 1955, and are due for readjusted in 1995 to conform with the Federal Coal Leasing Amendments Act of August 4, 1976. The need for this readjustment is mandated by regulation and the purpose of the readjustment is to review and adjust lease terms and conditions as needed and required.

DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND AFFECTS FROM THE PROPOSED ACTION:

Federal lease adjustments and readjustments are administrative actions and no surface disturbing activities will occur directly from readjusting the lease terms and conditions. However, since the terms and conditions of the lease will regulate exploration and mining activities when operations are approved, a development scenario is given to assess the probable impacts to the lands so that the lease terms and conditions can be formed to lessen the impacts.

Development plans to mine the coal from the South Lease properties are limited due to geologic and economic constraints. Access to mine the coal on the whole of the property is practically limited to either two options: (1) opening up the old Horse Canyon Mine to the north and rehabilitate the mine workings so that new underground development mining could proceed south to the lease area or (2) establish new surface facilities at the base of the Book Cliffs south of Horse Canyon and mine rock slopes up to the coal seam which outcrops high up on the cliffs. With either scenario, no surface facilities will be built on the two subject leases as the leases are far east of the Book Cliffs outcrop and the coal under both the leases is deep (1500+ feet of overburden) which preclude any access by shafts or slopes under existing or foreseeable economic conditions.

Mining scenarios for the two leases would be by underground mining using either the room and pillar or longwall mining methods. In either case, surface impacts would be limited to possible surface subsidence relative to the amount of coal extracted underground. Prediction of actual subsidence from mining is difficult if not impossible. Without an actual mine plan and full information concerning the properties and configuration of the coal and the overlaying rock strata, subsidence predictions are guesses. However, mining operations in other parts of the Book Cliffs have been monitored for subsidence and it is reasonable to predict similar occurrences. At two mines in the Book Cliffs coal region where room and pillar mining are ongoing, the amount of subsidence has been negligible with mining ongoing at depths greater than 1000 feet. At another mine where longwall mining is ongoing, total surface subsidence in the amounts less than the thickness of the coal extracted have been recorded. Surface expressions have been in the form of general ground lowering with some surface tension cracks that tend to self heal after a year or two. In areas with mining depths of greater than 1500 feet, little measurable subsidence has occurred. Again subsidence is dependent on the effects of a specific mining plan on site specific geologic properties and features.

In general, impacts from underground mining on the subject leases, where mining depths are greater than 1500 feet, will be at maximum, ground lowering and some surface cracks. Mining plans can be formulated to minimize surface affects by controlled subsidence or prevent subsidence in sensitive areas.

Under the terms of the lease, the lessee has the right to explore the coal to gain information of the extent and quality of resource. Exploration is chiefly done by surface drilling to penetrate and measure the coal seam and to take core samples for testing. Core drilling is a temporary use that has been done on both the leases in the past. Impacts are the building of temporary roads to access the drill pad. The drill pads are normally less than a quarter of an acre where the ground is levelled and a drill fluid pit is dug. Drilling permits are issued on conditions of reclamation and mitigation if necessary. Drilling operations last no more than a few weeks per drill hole.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION:

<u>Critical element</u>	<u>Affected</u>		<u>Critical element</u>	<u>Affected</u>	
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>		<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Air quality	—	X	T & E species	—	X
ACEC's	—	X	Hazardous waste	—	X
Cultural resources	—	X	Water quality	X	—
Prime/unique farmland	—	X	Wetlands/riparian	—	X
Floodplains	—	X	Wild & scenic rivers	—	<i>gn</i>
Nat. Amer. Religion	—	X	Wilderness/IMP	<i>gn</i>	—
Visual Resources	—	<i>gn</i>			

IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION:

Wilderness

Lease U-014217 is not within or adjacent to lands being considered for wilderness designation by the BLM or identified in HR 1500. The eastern boundary of lease U-014218 abuts on the Turtle Canyon WSA. All but 60 acres of this lease are within the area proposed for wilderness designation under HR 1500. While the proposed action in and of itself would not affect wilderness values, it is the precedent that would allow development of the coal lease which could include impairing activities. Surface disturbing activities within HR 1500 areas would be covered in a future mine plan for the area. Since the lease is a valid existing right, surface disturbance could be permitted if it were shown they were reasonable in the development of the lease. If permitted, surface disturbing activities would adversely affect primary wilderness values that may be present.

Absent a mine plan, it is impossible to predict the exact nature and extent of surface facilities on the lease, the following are possibilities:

- Coal exploration drill holes.
- Ventilation shafts with or without fans.
- Vertical rock shafts with lifting gear.
- Roads associated with any of the above.

Under current and foreseeable economics and mining technology and the extreme depth of the coal, it is unlikely that surface facilities other than exploration holes would be developed on the surface of the lease.

Subsidence resulting from mining could disrupt the availability of water from springs. This in turn would affect the distribution of the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep in the area. The springs and the bighorn sheep are supplemental wilderness values. In other areas in the Book Cliffs coal region, underground mining has not appeared to disrupt springs. Impacts of this sort would need to be addressed in NEPA documentation when a specific mining plan is submitted.

Water Resources

Subsidence may intercept ground water flows to the springs located within and downslope of the lease areas. However, no documented disruptions of springs above underground mine workings have been noted at other mines in the Book Cliffs coal region. Coal development should be preceded by flow and quality measurements of all surface water and ground water outcrops within the lease

areas and one mile downslope of the area. Flow and quality of springs should be monitored four times annually for the duration of operations. Adequate mitigation for loss or degradation of water resources should be determined and ensured. Specific recommendations should be addressed at the mine plan submission stage which would address impacts and mitigation through the NEPA process.

Wildlife Resources

The proposed action could result in construction of support surface facilities such as fan portals, equipment/man shafts, coal exploration drilling and other mining related activities. All of these actions would increase human presence and activities in the area which would impact wildlife species. These include large mammal species such as mule deer, elk, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, mountain lion and black bear. The cliff areas provide habitat for a large raptor nesting population including but not limited to golden eagles, prairie falcons and redtail hawks.

No specific development plans are included with the proposed lease readjustments. However, granting coal leases gives certain rights to develop the coal resource. Specific mining plans must be submitted before mining can take place. Impacts of these specific plans would be addressed by NEPA documentation for the mining plan submission. Seasonal restrictions, on and offsite mitigation and other impact analysis would occur at this stage. Under foreseeable development scenarios, no surface facilities would be built on the two leases and only underground mining would take place with possible limited surface drilling. Impacts to wildlife would be addressed at this stage.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE:

Under this alternative the leases would not be readjusted and the leases would expire. This alternative is rejected as the lessee has the right to renew leases as long as the terms of the lease are met.

PERSONS/AGENCIES CONSULTED:

PRRA Range Conservationist: Ray Jenson
PRRA Wildlife Biologist: David Mills
PRRA Archaeologist: Blaine Miller
PRRA Hydrologist: Kerry Flood
PRRA Recreation Planner: Dennis Willis
PRRA Realty Specialist: Mark Mackiewicz

Stephen W. Falk
Team Leader

Mining Engineer
Title

12/14/94
Date

Attachments:

- (1) Map of area
- (2) Standard lease stipulations

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined that the proposed action with the attached standard lease stipulations for both leases will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The proposed readjustments are in conformance with the approved land use plan. I recommend readjusting the two Federal coal leases with the attached lease stipulations.

Mark E. Bailey
Price River Resource Area Manager

15 Dec. 94
Date

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, by and through the Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior, and the Bureau of Reclamation, Department of the Interior, do hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of the original as the same appears in the files of the Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior, and the Bureau of Reclamation, Department of the Interior, at Washington, D.C., this 15th day of December, 1994.

BLM STIPULATIONS

The following stipulations made part of this lease may be waived or amended with the mutual consent of the lessor and lessee.

1. In accordance with Sec. 523(b) of the "Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977," surface mining and reclamation operations conducted on this lease are to conform with the requirements of this act and are subject to compliance with Office of Surface Mining regulations, or as applicable, a Utah program equivalent approved under cooperative agreement in accordance with Sec. 523(c). The United States Government does not warrant that the entire tract will be susceptible to mining.

2. The permitting of any mining operations on the lease will be subject to the possible designation of any portion of the lease as unsuitable for some or all kinds of surface mining under the regulations of the Department under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (SMCRA) in effect at the time of action on the mine plan permit.

3. Before undertaking activities that may disturb the surface of previously undisturbed leased lands, the lessee may be required to conduct a cultural resource inventory of the areas to be disturbed. These studies shall be conducted by qualified professional cultural resource specialists and a report prepared itemizing the findings. A plan will then be submitted making recommendations for the protection of, or measures to be taken to mitigate impacts for identified cultural resources.

If significant cultural resources are discovered during operations under this lease, the lessee shall immediately bring them to the attention of the authorized officer who shall evaluate or have evaluated such discoveries and, within 5 working days, shall notify the lessee what action shall be taken with respect to such discoveries.

The cost of conducting the inventory, preparing reports, and carrying out necessary protective mitigating measures shall be borne by the lessee.

4. Before undertaking activities that may disturb the surface of previously undisturbed leased lands, the lessee may be required to conduct a paleontological appraisal of the areas to be disturbed. The appraisal shall be conducted by qualified paleontologists and a report prepared itemizing the findings. A plan will then be submitted making recommendations for the protection of, or measures to be taken to mitigate impacts for identified paleontological resources.

If paleontological remains (fossils) of significant scientific interest are discovered during operations under this lease, the lessee shall immediately bring them to the attention of the authorized officer who shall evaluate or have evaluated such discoveries brought to his attention and, within 5 working days, shall notify the lessee what action shall be taken with respect to such discoveries. Paleontological remains of significant scientific interest do not include leaves, ferns, or dinosaur tracks commonly encountered during underground mining operations.

The cost of conducting the inventory, preparing reports, and carrying out necessary protective mitigating measures shall be borne by the lessee. The cost of salvage of paleontological remains (fossils) shall be borne by the United States.

5. If there is reason to believe that threatened or endangered (T&E) species of plants or animals, or migratory species of high Federal interest occur in the area, the lessee shall be required to conduct an intensive field inventory of the area to be disturbed and/or impacted. A listing of migratory birds of high Federal interest in Federal coal producing regions is published by the Fish and Wildlife Service, Migratory Bird Management Office, Washington, D.C. The inventory shall be conducted by qualified specialist and a report of findings will be prepared. A plan will be prepared making recommendations for the protection of these species or action necessary to mitigate the disturbance.

The cost of conducting the inventory, preparing reports, and carrying out necessary protective mitigating measures shall be borne by the lessee.

6. The lessee shall be required to perform a study to secure adequate baseline data to quantify the existing surface resources on and adjacent to the lease area. Existing data may be used if such data is adequate for the intended purposes. The study shall be adequate to locate, quantify, and demonstrate the inter-relationship of the geology, topography, surface hydrology, vegetation, and wildlife. Baseline data will be established so that future programs of observation can be incorporated at regular intervals for comparison.

7. Powerlines on the lease area used in conjunction with the mining of coal from this lease shall be constructed so as to provide adequate protection for raptors and other large birds. When feasible, powerlines will be located at least 100 yards from public roads.

8. The lessee shall provide for the suppression and control of fugitive dust on haul roads and at coal handling and storage facilities on the lease area. The migration of road surfacing and subsurface materials into streams and water courses shall be prevented.

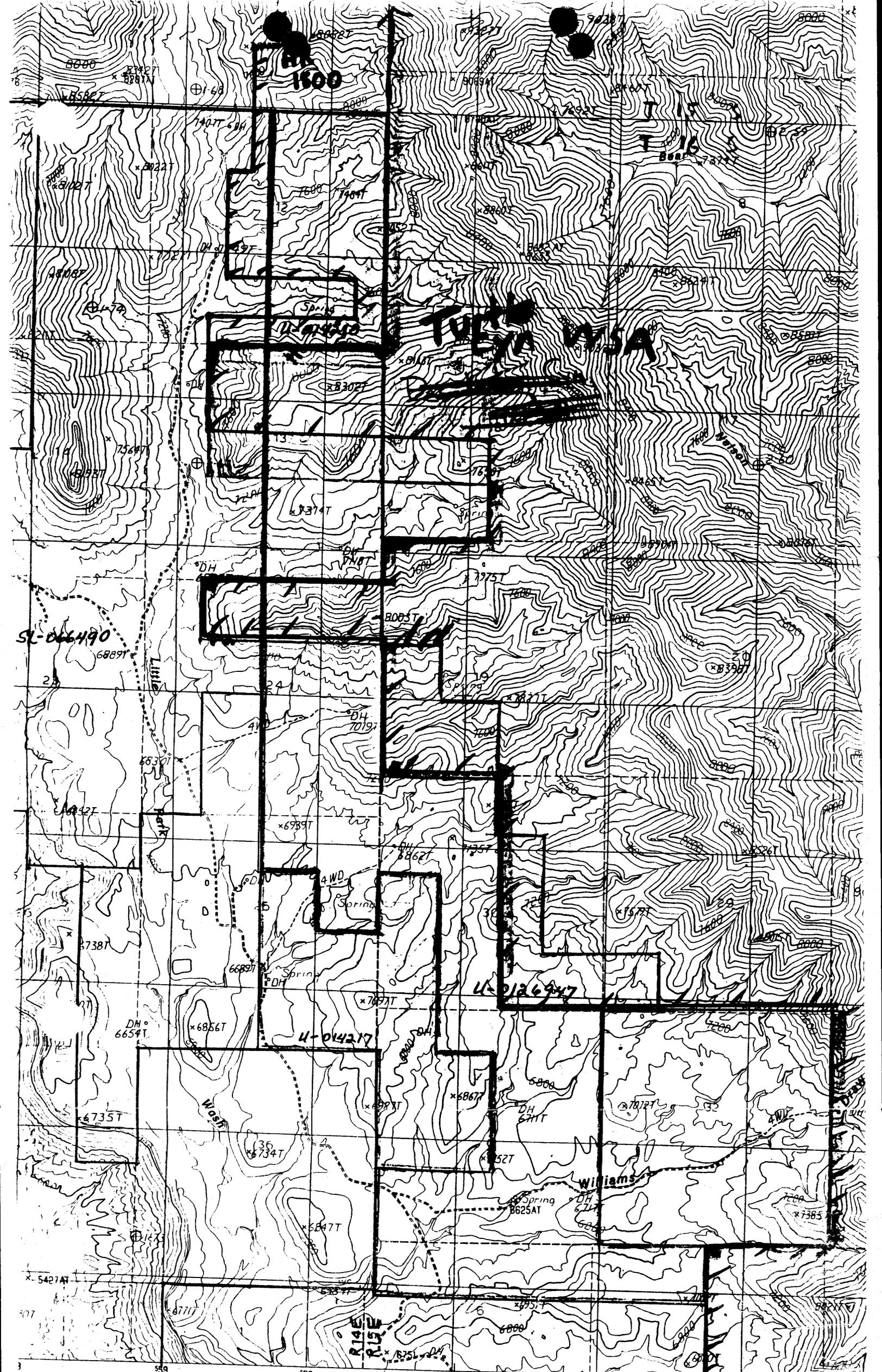
9. The lessee shall be required to establish a monitoring system to locate, measure, and quantify the progressive and final effects of underground mining activities on the topographic surface, underground and surface hydrology and vegetation. The monitoring system shall utilize techniques which will provide a continuing record of change over time and an analytical method for location and measurement of a number of points over the lease area. The monitoring shall incorporate and be an extension of the baseline data.

10. Except at specifically approved locations, underground mining operations shall be conducted in such a manner so as to prevent surface subsidence that would: 1) cause the creation of hazardous conditions such as potential escarpment failure and landslides, 2) cause damage to existing surface structures, or 3) damage or alter the flow of perennial streams.

11. In order to avoid surface disturbance on steep canyon slopes and to satisfy the need for surface access, all surface breakouts for ventilation tunnels shall be constructed from inside the mine, except at specifically approved locations.

12. Support facilities, structures, equipment, and similar developments will be removed from the lease area within 2 years after the final termination of use of such facilities. This provision shall apply unless the requirement of Section 10 of the lease form is applicable. Disturbed areas and those areas occupied by such facilities will be stabilized and rehabilitated, drainages reestablished, and the areas returned to a premining land use.

13. The lessee shall be required to pay the value of the royalty on coal left unmined without the authorized officer (AO) approval, which should have been recovered under the approval of a mine plan (Resource Recovery and Protection Plan, [R2P2]) and which would otherwise be lost or left economically inaccessible.



SCALE 1:24 000

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