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State of Utah
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

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original: 007/034 #2
cc: P. Baker
Paul let's discuss.
Dana

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DIVISION OF
OIL, GAS & MINING

December 7, 1993

David Steed
Environmental Industrial Services
4855 N. Spring Glen Road
Spring Glen, Utah 84526

Dear David:

The Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) has reviewed Soldier Creek Coal Company's proposal to utilize their proposed sediment pond as a permanent wildlife enhancement feature. We have the following comments and recommendations regarding this proposal.

Water is often a limiting habitat component for wildlife in this arid region. The development of an additional water source is a practice which could significantly enhance the value of this area for wildlife. Ponds and the associated riparian/wetland habitat in this general vicinity are utilized by pronghorn antelope, mallard ducks, cinnamon teal, green-wing teal, grebes, killdeer, short-eared owls, northern harriers, and a variety of other waterfowl, shore birds, and small mammals. If properly designed, the proposed sediment pond could supply water and habitat for a variety of species. However, unless design specifications were adapted towards specific wildlife needs such as water quality, water availability during critical seasons and appropriate vegetative cover, the benefits of such a project would be minimal. A greater benefit to wildlife would be derived from proper reclamation using an appropriate upland seed mix.

Water, by itself, provides some value to wildlife, primarily as drinking water. However, the greatest values are realized through water in association with a diverse vegetative component. Will this pond provide a reliable source of water in adequate quantities to support wetland, riparian or aquatic vegetation? Ideally, water should be available year round to provide drinking water during the hot summer months. This would be particularly beneficial to pronghorn antelope. If adequate water will be available, then the development of this pond as a wildlife enhancement project could be feasible.

Water rights is an issue that should be investigated. Does Soldier Creek Coal Company have adequate water rights to store water in a permanent pond? Are water rights even necessary for this type of development? If water rights are necessary, would



Soldier Creek be willing to acquire them and consider transferring them to the DWR for long term management of this pond as wildlife habitat? We recommend that the Division of Water Rights be contacted to clarify this issue.

With regard to specific practices that would make the pond more attractive to wildlife, we offer the following recommendations.

-- The pond design specifications indicate that an inside slope of 3:1 would be used. We would recommend that a more gentle slope be utilized in order to facilitate access by wildlife. Steep slopes increase the possibility of trapping wildlife and making access difficult. A more gentle slope would also enhance the development of emergent and aquatic vegetation. We realize that there may be some design constraints, but urge that this issue be carefully considered.

-- All coal fines and sediments containing coal fines should be removed from the pond and surrounding areas prior to allowing wildlife access. The presence of coal fines in the pond presents some concerns with regard to water quality and vegetation establishment. If contamination of the sediments is obvious, then the pond should be cleaned. If contamination is not obvious, the sediments should be tested. If toxic materials are not present, the sediments could remain in place, provided the holding capacity of the pond was not diminished. Without the removal of toxic materials, there is the potential for negative impacts to wildlife and the DWR could not support the use of this pond for wildlife.

-- Adequate vegetative cover should be established in the vicinity of the pond. The objective should be to establish a diversity of structural types. Vegetation should not be so dense as to preclude access to water by pronghorn antelope. A diversity of structure will provide areas of valuable wildlife habitat. The following is a list of species we recommend for use in establishing cover in the vicinity of the pond. Grass and forb species can be seeded, but we would recommend the use of cuttings or nursery stock to establish the shrub species.

Grass and Grasslike Species

Saltgrass (*Distichlis stricta*)
Streambank Wheatgrass (*Agropyron dasystachyum riparium*)
Meadow Foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*)
Redtop (*Agrostis alba*)
Reed Canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinaceae*)
Water Sedge (*Carex aquatilis*)
Nebraska Sedge (*Carex nebraskensis*)
Beaked Sedge (*Carex rostrata*)

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Alkali Bulrush (Scirpus maritimus)
Baltic Rush (Juncus balticus)
Cattail (Typha latifolia)

Forb Species

Strawberry Clover (Trifolium fragiferum)
Alsikes Clover (Trifolium hybridum)
Yellow Sweetclover (Melilotus officinalis)

Shrub Species

Coyote Willow (Salix exigua)
Nootka Rose (Rosa nutkana)

These species require reliable water and should be planted around the periphery of the pond to take advantage of the stored water. These species will provide a diverse and valuable wetland and riparian community. The upland area surrounding the pond should be seeded with the mix approved in the reclamation plan for the loadout.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this proposal. We are supportive of the objective to develop a water source for wildlife. If a reliable supply of good quality water can be provided by the development of this pond, then the value of habitat in this area can be enhanced. Please contact Ken Phippen or Scott Richardson if you have any questions regarding our comments or if we can be of additional assistance.

Sincerely,



Miles Moretti
Regional Supervisor

SR:j

Copy: Ralph Miles, DWR
Daron Haddock, DOGM