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State of Utah
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

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DIV OF OIL, GAS & MINING

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February 21, 1996

Charles J. Jankiewicz, District Ranger
U.S. Forest Service - Manti-LaSal National Forest
Price Ranger District
599 West Price River Drive
Price, Utah 84501

Dear Charlie:

We are concerned with the recent activity of Energy West in Rilda Canyon. As you are aware, they applied for and received a permit to open a new portal to the Deer Creek Mine and install a new fan in Rilda Canyon. Stipulations in the permit required all construction activities to be completed by December 1. Due to delays in construction, the fan and portal were not completed at that time.

In November and again in January, we were contacted by Energy West requesting extensions. We visited the canyon and observed that due to a mild, open winter, significant numbers of big game, particularly elk, had not entered the canyon. We set up a monitoring plan and stipulated conditions that allowed the extensions. The latter was allowed until the elk moved into the canyon on February 15. These were subsequently forwarded to DOGM.

Heavy snows fell early in February and elk moved into the canyon. On February 3, Derris Jones of our office conducted an aerial survey and found over one hundred elk distributed throughout the canyon. This information resulted in a discussion with DOGM and Energy West. We requested that they car-pool in an attempt to reduce traffic in the canyon, thereby minimizing disturbance to the elk. At that time, Energy West assured us that by February 15, any workers required for the project could access the site through the mine. We then asked that all road activity cease at that time.

Yet again, Energy West has requested additional time. They plan to activate the fan on the 24th and 25th of February and access through the mine is not possible from the 21st through the 25th. For this reason, they want to keep car-pooling until that time. They also informed us that all other construction activities at the site could be postponed until summer.

Apparently, we are the victims of a break down in communication. We were given the impression that you allowed them to continue until the 25th. We now understand that you were informed that we approved the extension.



Charles J. Jankiewicz

February 21, 1996

Joe Helfrich of DOGM called Bill Bates on the 15th and discussed the situation. Bill inquired as to the Forest Service's feelings with the extension. He was aware of your concerns with the condition of the road. He was told, "They don't have a problem with it. The only concern they have is that a couple of truck loads of gravel be hauled in to stabilize the road." Bill then expressed our position that this activity would add to the disturbance problem. Mr. Helfrich agreed. At that point he agreed that the car-pooling would probably not make the situation worse, provided that all other activity cease after the 25th.

This project has brought several factors to light. First, our agencies need to communicate more effectively. Although Bill and Steve Romero discussed the situation several times, Energy West and DOGM contacted each of our agencies separately. It appears it would be better when similar situations arise that all parties sit down and come to a consensus.

Second, our observations were that the activity in Rilda Canyon did cause elk to abandon this important winter range. Within a week of the survey, elk had confined their activity to the mouth of the canyon and the ridges above it. At the same time, elk use continued to be heavy in Mill Fork Canyon. We feel the upgrading of the road has had the most significant impact. Traffic has come from many sources, including construction workers, inspectors, cougar hunters, our own Conservation Officers, snowmobilers, and sledders. If this level of traffic continues, this canyon will have limited value as elk winter range. We recommend that in future years, the road be closed at the Forest Service boundary from December 1 to April 15. We also recommend it be closed from February 26 to April 15 this year. In addition, we request that Energy West be required to mitigate impacts to the elk this season. We would like to get with you staff and develop a project that would enhance nearby elk winter range on Forest Service lands.

We apologize for our part in the breakdown in coordination efforts on this project. We hope to work more closely with you. Please let me know if you need more information.

Sincerely,



Miles Moretti
Regional Supervisor

copies: Joe Helfrich, DOGM
Bob Valentine
John Kimball
Ralph Miles