

## **Supplementary Scoping Information Blackleaf Project EIS**

### **Proposed Project**

Startech Energy, Inc. (Operator of the Blackleaf Unit, a Federal Oil and Gas Unit), hereinafter referred to as “Startech” has submitted to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Applications for Permit to Drill (APD) for natural gas on lease, MTM 24615. This lease is located on BLM managed land, in Teton County along the Rocky Mountain Front. The proposed drilling location is within the Montana Thrust Belt, approximately 75 miles northwest of Great Falls, Montana.

Startech proposes drilling three wells from one location within the existing Blackleaf Exploration Unit at T. 25 N., R. 8 W, section 6. The proposed exploratory/development well would offset a Known Geologic Structure that was tested for natural gas from an exploratory well in Muddy Creek drilled in 1959. The surface location of Startech’s proposed drill site is located within BLM’s Blind Horse Outstanding Natural Area. In addition to public land managed by the BLM, the proposed action involves privately owned surface estate and land managed by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

The first well would be drilled vertically to approximately 6,500 feet, and the next two wells would be drilled directionally from the same drill site to fully develop the natural gas reservoir. Approximately four acres would be disturbed in order to construct a well pad (400 feet by 400 feet) to accommodate the drilling rig and subsequent production equipment. Existing roads and pipelines would be utilized to minimize impacts to the area, though portions of the road system would need to be upgraded. Approximately 200 feet of new road would be constructed from the existing road to the proposed well site. Approximately eight miles of new pipeline would be constructed from the well site to the existing production facility located in T. 26 N., R. 8 W., section 8.

In order to minimize activity at the well site following the drilling and completion of the wells, Startech proposes to produce full well stream fluids to the existing production facility located in section 8. This facility would be upgraded. Produced fluids would be compressed at this production facility, and then transferred by pipeline to a distant gas processing facility. (The gas processing plant is a reasonable foreseeable action and therefore, expected impacts would be evaluated, but not to the same degree as for the proposed action.) At the gas plant, hydrocarbon condensate (oil) and water would be separated and recovered. The gas would be sweetened to remove approximately 0.5% hydrogen sulfide (H<sub>2</sub>S) contaminant, and then processed to place it into marketable condition for sale into an existing natural gas pipeline approximately 25 miles north east of the project area. Two shut-in wells, from previous drilling and production activity in the Blackleaf Unit in the 1980s, would be returned to production upon successful completion of the proposed wells.

### **Relationship to Existing Plans and Documents**

The document which directs management of public lands administered by the Lewistown Field Office is the Headwaters Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (Record of Decision dated July 1984). Direction regarding oil and gas leasing and development is as follows:

Oil and gas leasing and development is permitted on 99,700 acres of federal mineral estate along the Rocky Mountain Front. Oil and gas leasing and development within specific portions, 44,990 acres, of the Rocky Mountain Front area are subject to seasonal restrictions and to no surface occupancy stipulations to protect important grizzly bear and other wildlife habitat, and to prevent surface disturbance in the Outstanding Natural Areas. Approximately 18,550 acres are not available for leasing because of no surface occupancy restrictions that effectively prohibit oil and gas development. The remaining 36,160 acres along the Rocky Mountain Front may be leased subject only to standard stipulations.

The proposed action would be located within the Blind Horse Outstanding Natural Area on a lease that predates the outstanding natural area designation. The Headwaters Resource Management Plan established broad management direction for the outstanding natural areas (ONAs) including the Blind Horse. The Rocky Mountain Front

Outstanding Natural Area Activity Plan/Environmental Assessment, March 1989, provides specific objectives, constraints, and management policy for all current and proposed actions on the ONAs.

### **Use Authorizations**

Use authorizations such as permits and rights-of-way for roads, pipelines, and well site facilities would be processed through the BLM Applications for Permits to Drill (APD) and Sundry Notices as long as the appropriate facilities remain on the applicable federal lease and are owned and operated by the unit operator. Any facility located outside a federal lease would require individual rights-of-way permits.

### **National Environmental Policy Act**

Under provisions of section 102 (2) (C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and pertinent Federal regulations, the BLM has announced its intention to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and to solicit public comments regarding issues, concerns and resource information pertaining to this proposed project.

The EIS will analyze the applicant's proposal and an agency reasonable foreseeable development scenario (RFD) expected during the life of this project, which includes an additional eight potential locations. The gas processing plant is also a reasonable foreseeable action and therefore, expected impacts would be evaluated but not to the same degree as for the proposed action.

Based on internal scoping of the proposal and existing information, the following preliminary issues have been identified for analysis in the EIS, including: cultural heritage resources; visual resource management concerns; social and economic conditions; threatened and endangered species, and sensitive species of wildlife and plants and their habitats; air quality; water quality; recreation; noxious weeds; and reasonable foreseeable future actions.

### **Scoping**

"Scoping" refers to the phase of the NEPA process where; the lead agency preparing the EIS invites the participation of affected federal, state, and local agencies, and any affected Indian tribe, the proponent of the action, and other interested persons, to comment on the nature and extent of issues and impacts to be addressed in the EIS and the methods by which they will be evaluated.

Public participation assists the agency in determining the scope and the significant issues to be analyzed in depth in the environmental impact statement. It also assists the agency with identification and elimination from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review

All comments received at the public meetings or submitted in writing by mail or electronically via the internet will aid the BLM in identifying issues, developing a range of alternatives, and analyzing environmental impacts. The BLM will provide additional opportunities for public participation throughout the preparation of the EIS.

### **Public Participation**

This scoping notice has been mailed to approximately 600 addresses including individuals, government offices, elected and other officials, organizations, libraries, public land users, newspapers, and radio and television stations.