



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF SURFACE MINING  
RECLAMATION AND  
ENFORCEMENT  
Western Region Office  
1999 Broadway, Suite  
3320  
Denver, CO 80202-3050



## Certified Mail Return Receipt Requested

June 9, 2017

Chairman Darwin St. Clair  
P.O. Box 538  
Fort Washakie, WY 82514

Dear Chairman St. Clair,

The U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE), Western Region Office has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for the Belle Ayr Mine North Tract federal mining plan modification (the Project). The EA and unsigned FONSI are available for review as of June 6, 2017. All comments must be received or postmarked by July 10, 2017 to be considered. For your convenience, the EA and the unsigned FONSI can be accessed on the OSMRE Western Region website at:

<https://www.wrcc.osmre.gov/initiatives/belleAyrMine.shtm>.

The lease and sale of the federal coal included in the Belle Ayr North LBA (WYW161248) was originally evaluated in the 2009 South Gillette Area Coal Lease Applications Environmental Impact Statement. The coal was offered for sale in a sealed-bid, competitive lease process on July 13, 2011. Following determination by the Bureau of Land Management that the highest bid at the sale met or exceeded the fair market value of the coal within the tract, the bid submitted by BTU Western Resources Inc. was accepted. The lease was subsequently transferred from BTU Western Resources to Alpha Wyoming Land Company (now Contura Energy, Inc.) in July of 2012. In accordance with Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 (MLA), the Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management (ASLM) must approve the mining plan modification for federal coal lease WYW161248 before mining of the federal coal can occur.

OSMRE has prepared this EA to evaluate the environmental impacts resulting from the Project, pursuant to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. The Belle Ayr Mine is located approximately 10 miles south-southeast of Gillette, Wyoming. Through the end of 2016, the total amount of federal coal remaining for removal at the Belle Ayr Mine was approximately 43.0 million tons (Mt). Based on remaining coal reserves and the estimated future production rate, mining of federal coal reserves at the Belle Ayr Mine would be completed in approximately 2.2 years if the Project is not approved. Under the currently approved State mine permit approved in 2013, mining operations have disturbed 7,304 acres. Since 2010, the annual production rate has ranged from a high of about 25.8 Mt in 2010 to a low of about 14.9 Mt in 2016. Due to the uncertainty in determining the demand for coal, the EA has been prepared assuming that the average annual production rate would be 20 Mt. The amount of mineable federal coal to be added at this mine as a result of the Project is approximately 221.7 Mt and the proposed modification would add approximately 1,481.8 acres of disturbance. The approval would extend the life of mine by

approximately 10.4 years. The coal would be mined using conventional surface-mining methods and shipped from an onsite railroad loading facility to various sites within the United States.

As required by NEPA, the EA discloses the potential for direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to the environment from the Project. In accordance with the 2011 DOI Policy on Consultation with Indian Tribes and 36 CFR Part 800.2(c)(2)(ii), the regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended [NHPA]), OSMRE requests continued consultation with your tribe for the stages of the proposal development and implementation of the final federal action. The EA updates, clarifies, and provides new and additional environmental information for the Project. As a result of the EA process, OSMRE has determined there are no significant environmental impacts and has issued an unsigned Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The ASLM will approve, disapprove, or conditionally approve the mining plan approval document within the mining plan decision document, as required under the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920.

A hard copy of the EA and unsigned FONSI will also be available for review at the following locations:

Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, Western Region  
1999 Broadway, Suite 3320  
Denver, CO 80202  
Between the hours of 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM, Monday through Friday  
(Closed Saturday and Sunday)

Campbell County Courthouse  
500 S. Gillette Ave.  
Gillette, WY 82716  
Between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday  
(Closed Saturday and Sunday)

Campbell County Public Library  
2101 S 4-J Rd  
Gillette, WY 82718  
Between the hours of 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM Monday through Thursday, Friday and  
Saturday—Between 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM, Sunday - Closed

You are invited to direct your comments on the EA and unsigned OSMRE FONSI to: ATTN: Belle Ayr North Tract EA, C/O: Gretchen Pinkham, OSMRE WR, 1999 Broadway, Suite 3320, Denver, CO 80202-3050. Comments may also be emailed to: [osm-nepa-wy@osmre.gov](mailto:osm-nepa-wy@osmre.gov), ensure the subject line reads: **ATTN: OSMRE, Belle Ayr North Tract EA**. OSMRE requests that you refer to the specific chapter, section, and/or page number of the EA and/or FONSI that is associated with your comment. All comments must be received or postmarked by July 10, 2017 to be considered. Additional information regarding this Project may be obtained from Ms. Gretchen Pinkham at (303) 293-5088 or at [gpinkham@osmre.gov](mailto:gpinkham@osmre.gov).

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Shaeffer, Manager  
Field Operations Branch