



United States Department of the Interior



OFFICE OF SURFACE MINING RECLAMATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Western Region Office
1999 Broadway, Suite 3320
Denver, CO 80202-3050

September 10, 2015

Dear Interested Public Land User,

The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE), Western Region Office, will prepare an environmental assessment (EA) for a Federal mining plan modification for the Freedom Mine's West Mine Area (the Project). The application to lease Federal Coal Tract NDM-91535 was filed with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) by Coteau Properties Company (Coteau) on January 16, 2002 and subsequently approved by the BLM for competitive lease sale on November 1, 2005. Coteau was the successful high bidder during the lease sale. On April 1, 2011, in accordance with the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920 (MLA), Coteau received Federal mining plan approval from the Assistant Secretary of Lands and Mineral Management (ASLM) to mine portions of Federal Coal Tract NDM-91535 at the Freedom Mine, Surface Coal Mining Permit NACT-0201. On October 28, 2014, the North Dakota Public Service Commission notified OSMRE that they had received Permit Revision (PR) No. 18 for Coteau's Surface Coal Mining Permit NACT-0201 for the Project (including mining of portions of Federal Coal Tract NDM-91535) in accordance with its responsibilities under the Federal Surface Mining and Reclamation Control Act (SMCRA) of 1977.

OSMRE is preparing this EA to evaluate the environmental impacts resulting from the Project, pursuant to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The Freedom Mine is located approximately 10 miles north of Beulah, North Dakota, north of Highway 200 in Mercer County, North Dakota. The total amount of Federal coal authorized for removal within the currently approved Federal mining plan is approximately 45.1 million tons (mmt) and an estimated 39.1 mmt of coal remains to be mined. PR No.18 proposes to add zero Federal surface acres to the approved permit area and add approximately 960 Federal coal acres and 25.6 mmt of Federal coal to the approved Federal mining plan. The Freedom Mine uses a combination of dragline and truck shovel mining methods. The average production rate at the Freedom Mine is approximately 13.5 million tons per year (mmtpy) and the maximum production rate is 16 mmtpy. PR No. 18 would not change the average production rate or the maximum production rate for the life of the mining operation. Freedom Mine started operation in 1983 and the life of mine would continue operation until 2045. This mining plan modification would not extend the life of the mine.

The EA will disclose the potential for direct, indirect and cumulative impacts to the environment from the Project. Further, this EA will update, clarify, and provide new and additional environmental information for the Project. Through the EA process, OSMRE will determine whether or not there are

significant environmental impacts. If a finding of no significant impact is reached the OSMRE Director will make a recommendation to the DOI's ASLM on the Federal mining plan modification, and the ASLM will approve, approve with conditions, or disapprove the Federal mining plan modification as required under the MLA. If the EA identifies significant impacts, an environmental impact statement will be prepared.

OSMRE is soliciting public comments on the Project. Your comments will help to determine the issues and alternatives that will be evaluated in the environmental analysis. You are invited to direct these comments to:

ATTN: Freedom Mine West Mine Area EA
C/O: Lauren Mitchell
Western Region Office, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement
1999 Broadway, Suite 3320
Denver, CO 80202-3050

Comments may also be emailed to: OSM-NEPA-ND@OSMRE.gov. Comments should be received or postmarked no later than October 10, 2015 in order to be considered during the preparation of the EA. Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project and will be available for public inspection. Additional information regarding the Project may be obtained from Lauren Mitchell, telephone number (303) 293-5028. When available, the EA and other supporting documentation will be posted at: <http://www.wrcc.osmre.gov/initiatives/freedomMine.shtm>

Sincerely,

Marcelo Calle, Manager
Field Operations Branch