



# United States Department of the Interior



## OFFICE OF SURFACE MINING RECLAMATION AND ENFORCEMENT

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

December 13, 2019

[TITLE] [NAME]  
[ORGANIZATION]  
[ADDRESS]  
[CITY][STATE][ZIP CODE]

Dear [TITLE][NAME],

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) received notice from Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety<sup>1</sup> that the West Elk Mine, Permit Revision 15 (PR 15), Permit Application Package was administratively complete on April 5, 2018. The West Elk Mine is located in Gunnison County, CO. The West Elk Mine is owned and operated by Mountain Coal Company (MCC). OSMRE determined that the mine plan modification included in PR 15 would require a mining plan decision document (MPDD) on May 30, 2018.

The two federal coal leases included in PR 15, COC-1362 & COC-67232, were analyzed in the 2017 U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement (SFEIS) for Federal Coal Lease Modifications COC-1362 and COC-67232 (including on-lease exploration plan). OSMRE participated as a cooperating agency in the preparation of the SFEIS.

OSMRE adopted the SFEIS and issued a Record of Decision (ROD) on March 15, 2019. The Assistant Secretary of Lands and Minerals Management previously approved the MPDD on April 19, 2019. WildEarth Guardians and Sierra Club legally challenged the MPDD recommendation in the District Court of Colorado and on November 8, 2019 Judge Jackson remanded the ROD back to OSMRE for further consideration. Based on this decision, OSMRE prepared an environmental assessment (EA) to further analyze the project.

As part of the NEPA process, OSMRE is initiating a 10-day comment period on the EA on December 13, 2019 and closing on December 23, 2019. Comments are most useful when they are specific, cite relevant issues, and/or determine the extent of those issues.

Documents are available for review online at:

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

### **Project Description**

The West Elk Mine is an underground mine that uses longwall mining technology. The mining plan modification proposes to add 1,720 acres of federal coal, to the currently approved mining plan at the West Elk Mine. The proposed action would include 54 acres of proposed surface disturbing activities to install mine ventilation boreholes and associated roadways. Of the 1,720 federal coal acres proposed, 920

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<sup>1</sup> The Regulatory Authority for coal mines in Colorado that occur on state and private lands.

acres exists within the boundary of COC-67232, and 800 acres are within the boundary of COC-1362. Please see the enclosed maps for General Project Location. If approved, the action would authorize the mining of approximately 10,100,000 tons of coal and extend the life the West Elk Mine by approximately 2 years, and adds 51 acres of surface disturbance including voluntary methane flaring the methane emissions from underground mining based on the recent application from MCC to the Mine Safety and Health Administration.

The EA analyzes potential alternatives without methane flaring and analyzes potential impacts to fish and wildlife, hydrology, air quality and climate change, and cumulative impacts.

### **How to Comment**

Submit your substantive comments and information related to this proposal in writing to OSMRE by **December 23, 2019**. Your name and address must be included for your submission to be considered.

Email: [osm-nepa-co@osmre.gov](mailto:osm-nepa-co@osmre.gov)

OSMRE Website: <https://www.wrcc.osmre.gov/initiatives/westElkMine/westElkMine.shtm>

Postal Service: Gretchen Pinkham, OSMRE  
Attn: Gretchen Pinkham – West Elk Mine Modification EA  
1999 Broadway, Suite 3320  
Denver, CO 80202-3050

By including your address, phone number, email address, or other personally identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment, including your personally identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

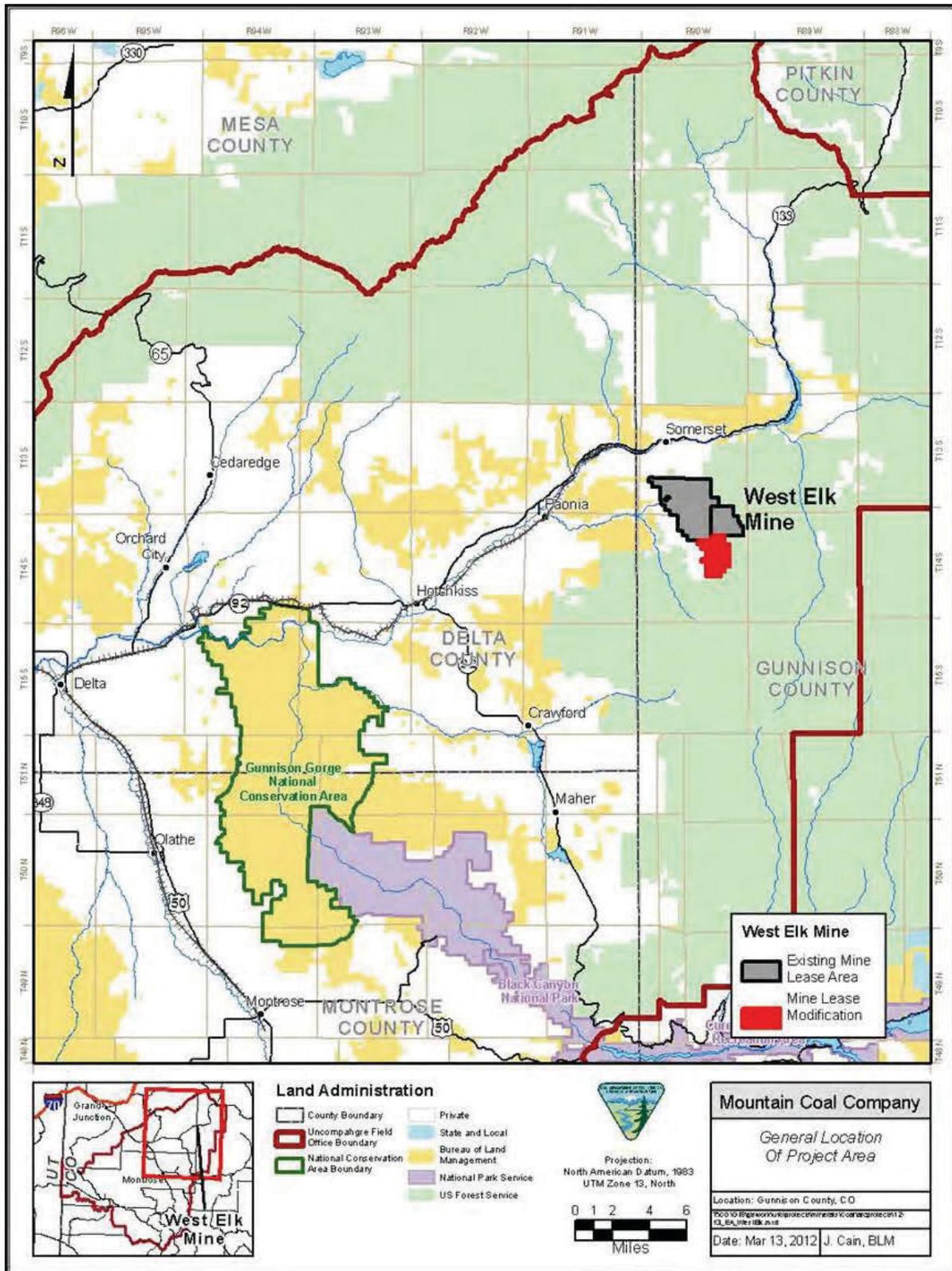
If you have questions about the OSMRE process, please contact Gretchen Pinkham, telephone number (303) 293-5088 and email [gpinkham@osmre.gov](mailto:gpinkham@osmre.gov).

Sincerely,

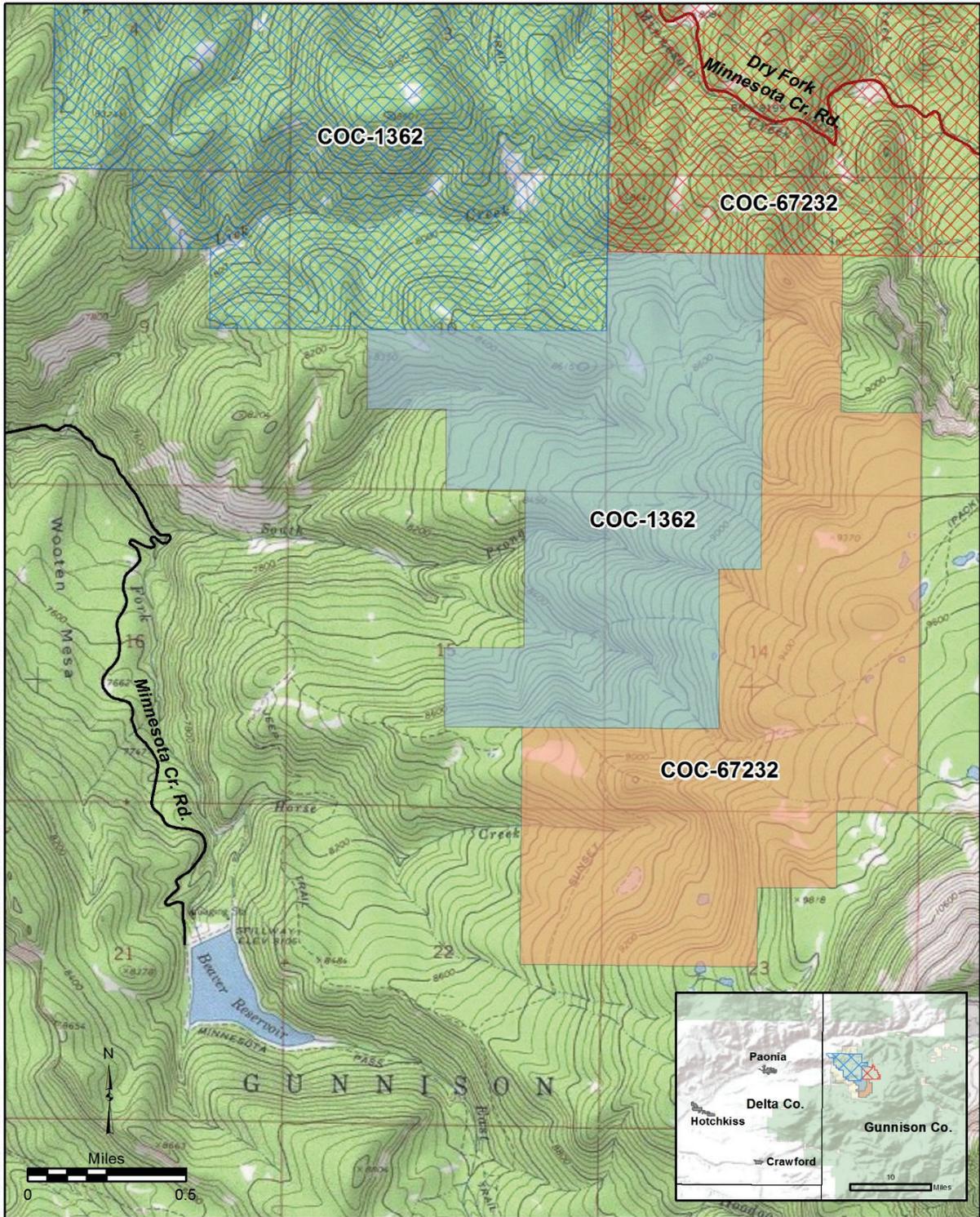


Elizabeth Shaeffer  
Manager, Field Operations Branch  
OSMRE - Western Region

Enclosure



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Date: 12/2/2019

**Legend**

- Minnesota Cr. Rd. (NFSR 710)
- Dry Fork Minnesota Cr. Rd. (NFSR 711)
- ▨ Federal Coal Lease COC-1362
- ▨ Federal Coal Lease COC-67232
- ▨ COC-1362 Lease Modification
- ▨ COC-67232 Lease Modification

**Project Location  
West Elk Mining  
Plan Modification EA  
Gunnison County, Colorado**