



SMOKY CANYON MINE PANELS F & G Environmental Impact Statement Newsletter August 2004



The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Pocatello Field Office and Caribou-Targhee National Forest (the Agencies) are preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the proposed development of panels F and G at the J.R. Simplot Smoky Canyon Phosphate Mine west of Afton, Wyoming. The purpose of this newsletter is to keep you informed of the project status. Copies of this newsletter, and other project information, will be available on BLM's project-specific website at www.id.blm.gov/offices/pocatello/sim_fg.

The EIS process was initiated with Federal Register Notice on September 15, 2003. Public scoping was conducted September 15 to October 18, 2003. Two public scoping meetings were held in Pocatello, Idaho and Afton, Wyoming on October 7 and 8, 2003. The Agencies received more than 220 paper and electronic comments. Some of the concerns raised include (but are not limited to): possible impacts to residents along Crow Creek Road, disturbance to Sage Creek and Meade Peak Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), mining within the Deer Creek watershed, potential selenium release, potential loss of mining related jobs and income, effects on plants and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, and potential impacts to Native American treaty rights.

The public scoping summary was issued in March 2004 and is available for review at the Agencies offices. Baseline data on numerous resources has been gathered from the project area over the course of the past two years. This data and other existing information and studies will form the basis for the description of the project area and resources addressed in the EIS.

As required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the EIS will describe the components of, reasonable alternatives to, and environmental consequences of continued operation and expansion of mining facilities at the Smoky Canyon Mine. In addition to the Proposed Action and No Action alternatives, the Agencies have preliminarily identified several potential mining and transportation alternatives to be analyzed in the EIS. The mining alternatives address concerns about enlarging leases in IRAs, environmental effects of external overburden placement, and groundwater impacts from infiltration of precipitation into seleniferous overburden or pit backfills. The transportation alternatives include various haul road alignments to connect panels F and G and existing facilities. Driving factors include avoidance/minimization of disturbance to roadless areas, avoidance of private lands, reduction of overall impacts to the Forest, road maintenance, and reduction of disturbance to the South Fork Sage Creek and Deer Creek watersheds. A conveyor alternative is also being evaluated which would eliminate the construction of a large haul road connecting Panels F and G, however, a smaller access road would still be needed for workers and supplies to reach the G panel area. The conveyor access road would either involve a widening and upgrade of the existing public Crow Creek and Wells Canyon Roads, or construction of a new road through the Forest. The proposed transportation and mining alternatives are shown on the back of this letter.

These alternatives are currently being analyzed; other alternatives may be developed. The proposed schedule for the EIS process includes a Draft EIS available for public review and comment around June 2005. Analysis is not complete and no decisions have been made at this time. We are not soliciting additional comments at this time. However, we encourage you to review and comment on the Draft EIS when it becomes available.

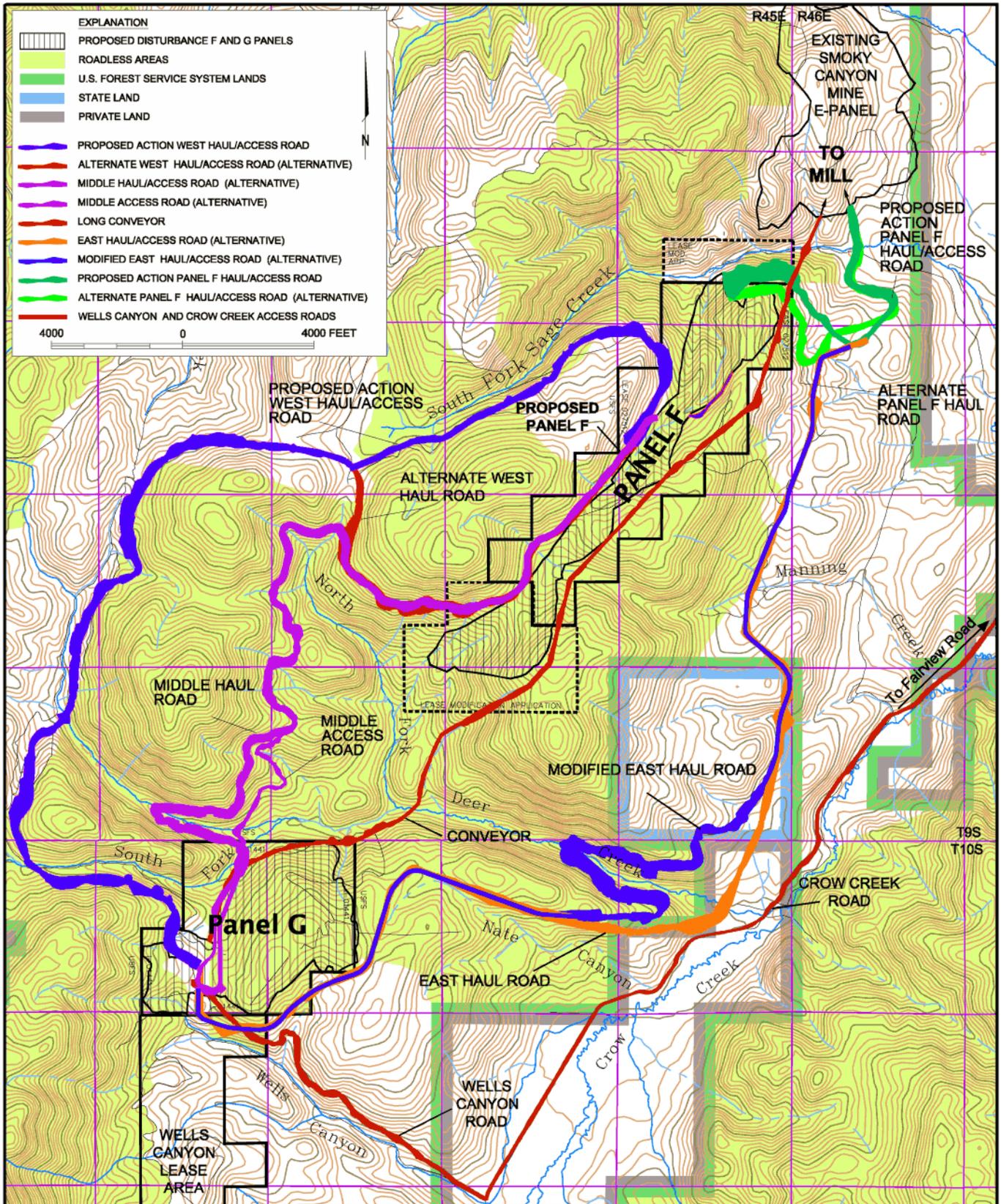


Figure shows boundaries of existing leases and lease modification applications, Inventoried Roadless Areas, and the Proposed Action mining disturbance area. The two Proposed Action haul/access roads are shown along with five alternate alignments for haul/access roads. Only one haul/access road would be built between Panels E and F and between Panels F and G. Each of the haul/access roads would provide for ore haulage from the proposed pits to the existing Smoky Canyon Mill and access to the proposed mines for mine workers and suppliers via Smoky Canyon Mill. If the conveyor from Panel G to the Smoky Canyon Mill was built, a separate access road would be required to transport mine workers and suppliers to Panel G. This access road would either be an upgrade of the existing Crow Creek and Wells Canyon roads, or construction of the Middle Access Road between Panels F and G.