

CA-160-07-008

LOCATION: Sespe Oil Field Section 34 T5N R19W S.B.B.M, Ventura County, California

AFFECTED SURFACE AREA (public/private): 1(Private) Acre.

NEAR WILDERNESS or WSA? Yes X No

ACEC (NAME): None

CONFORMANCE WITH APPLICABLE LAND USE PLAN

The proposed action falls under the Los Padres National Forest Land Management Plan approved in September 2005. This plan has been reviewed to determine if the proposed actions conform with the land use plan, terms, and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5-3(a).

RELATIONSHIP TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS, AND OTHER PLANS:

Caliente Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved in May 1997

I. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE ACTION

Oil & Gas Lease-Related Activities

The purpose for this action is to determine whether to approve two applications for permit to drill (APDs). Action is needed because BLM has received two APDs from Seneca Resources for accessing oil and gas resources for which they hold a lease. The area under consideration is Section 34 Township 5N Range 19W of the Sespe Oilfield. The majority of this field is in the Los Padres National Forest with the majority of the surface owned by the Forest Service. The BLM is responsible for reviewing applications and issuing leases for federal mineral estate within the national forest. (Map of the proposed well sites is attached in Appendix A)

The BLM received two applications for permit to drill (APD) from Seneca Resources. The proposed well sites are on an existing well pad, and within the boundaries of the Los Padres National Forest. The proposed well location is on private property, although the well will be drilled directionally to an area with federal surface and minerals. The wells are near the Sespe Condor Sanctuary. The BLM is preparing this assessment to review these applications.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action

Seneca Resources proposes to drill two wells, Powell 3 and Powell 4, in the Sespe Oil Field, Ventura County, California. The proposed wells will be drilled on an existing pad that contains 15 existing wells. The wells would be located in Section 34, T5N, R19W, on private surface and directionally drilled to federal mineral estate. The existing wells are currently producing petroleum via pumping units tied into existing flowlines and electrical facilities. No expansion of the pad or flowlines would be necessary to drill the additional wells. Well locations would be accessed using existing roads.

Seneca Resources operates petroleum production facilities on both private and public lands within the Sespe Oil Field. As part of the Sespe Operators Group, Seneca Resources entered into a 1991 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service and the Sespe Operators Group regarding oil and gas operations in the area and protection of California condors. One of the conditions of the MOU was to minimize surface operations by locating multiple wells on single pads. Consistent with the MOU, the new wells will be drilled on a pad with 15 existing wells.

Seneca Resources also proposes to implement the following measures to minimize the potential for impacts to California condors:

1. Prior to conducting work on-site, employees and contractors shall be aware of the protected species, and how to avoid and minimize impacts to them.
2. Direct contact with California condors shall be avoided.
3. Seneca Resources and/or its contractors shall clearly delineate the boundaries of work areas by posting stakes, flags and/or rope or cord, as necessary.
4. All work areas shall be kept free of trash and debris. Particular attention shall be paid to "microtrash." Trash shall be kept in closed containers and regularly removed from the project site.
5. All equipment and work-related materials shall be contained in closed containers either in the work area or on vehicles. Loose items (e.g., rags, hose, etc.) shall be stored within closed containers or enclosed in vehicles.
6. All hoses or cords that must be placed on the ground due to drilling operations that are outside of the primary work area (immediate vicinity of the drilling rig) shall be covered to prevent California condor access. Covering may take the form of burying or covering with heavy mats, planks, or grating that would preclude California condors.

7. All liquids shall be in closed, covered containers. Any spills of hydrocarbon/hazardous liquids shall not be left unattended until clean-up has been completed.
8. A not-to-exceed 20 mile-per-hour speed limit shall be implemented and enforced during all activities.
9. All construction equipment, staging areas, materials, and personnel shall be restricted to disturbed areas that are not habitat for listed species.
10. To prevent injury to wildlife, habitat degradation, erosion, and fires, driving off of disturbed areas without a pre-activity survey and implementation of appropriate measures is prohibited, except in the case of an emergency.
11. Firearms and pets are prohibited.
12. No feeding of wildlife shall be permitted.
13. The potential for human-caused wildfires should be minimized by use of shields, mats, or other fire-prevention methods when grinding or welding. Fire watch including water, extinguishers, and shovels shall be available for fire suppression.
14. Any significant encounters with California condors shall be recorded and reported to Mr. Tim Alburger of Seneca Resources (661-399-4270, ext. 3544; or 661-619-9926) and a designated BLM representative.
15. Any take (harm, harassment, injury, killing, etc., or any attempt to engage in these activities) shall be reported to Mr. Tim Alburger of Seneca Resources (661-399-4270, ext. 3544; or 661-619-9926). Mr. Alburger shall immediately notify the BLM, USFWS, and CDFG as appropriate. The activity that caused the take to occur shall be ceased immediately.

Drilling Process

The two proposed wells will be directionally drilled to an approximate depth of 8,000 feet. This project will occur totally on an existing well site with access road already in place.

The most commonly used drilling equipment is a rotary rig, which consists of (1) a power system, normally diesel-engine-powered electric generators (2) a hoisting system, which consists of a derrick mast, crown block, and traveling block used to lift and lower the drill; (3) the rotary system which consists of the drill bit attached to a length of tubular high tensile steel drill pipe (collectively called the "drill stem") which is turned by a rotary table; and (4) the circulating system consisting of mud tanks, mud pumps, and reserve pit. Depending on the height of the substructures, the mast may rise to over 160 feet above the ground surface and is the most visible and noticeable feature of a drill rig.

The start of the drilling is commonly referred to as “spudding”. The actual drilling is accomplished by passing the drill string through the rotary table, which turns the drill string and bit, which in turn performs the actual drilling. The weight of the drill string provides downward pressure on the drill bit, which chips and pulverizes the rock as it rotates in the bottom of the hole, by continually adding more drill stem pipe to the drill, the hole is steadily deepened.

The initial hole is drilled to a depth of 80 to 100 or more feet, depending on the surface geology of the area. The hole then is lined with conductor pipe (casing). The space between the conductor pipe and the drilled hole (borehole) is filled with cement. This prevents the unconsolidated surface formation from sloughing into the hole. The pipe must be set in rock that is capable of withstanding the maximum anticipated pressure to which it may be exposed.

After the conductor pipe is in place, a series of blowout preventer (BOP) valves are attached to the well. The valves will close down the well in the event the drill bit penetrates rock formations exhibiting extreme pressure zones that could cause unexpected changes in pressure and a well blowout. Blowouts are extremely dangerous and may result in uncontrolled fire, escape of toxic gases, loss of lives, extensive environmental damage, and loss of resources and equipment. It is usually very difficult and expensive to bring a well back under control. Therefore, special attention is given to the prevention of well blowouts and most of the equipment used to support the actual drilling operations is for controlling excess pressure that may be encountered. Blowout prevention equipment is tested and inspected by both the rig personnel and the BLM. The drill rig crew must be trained in safety and blowout prevention. As a result of these precautions blowouts are rare.

After installation of casing and BOP equipment, drilling is resumed using a smaller bit. After the borehole has penetrated all of the surface formations, which may contain fresh water, the bit and drill string are hoisted out of the well and another length of pipe (surface casing) is lowered into the borehole and cemented in place. The depth of the conductor pipe is an important part of blowout prevention. The casing also protects the quality of fresh water-bearing strata (aquifers) from being contaminated by drilling mud.

Drilling mud (fluid) is circulated through the drill pipe and bit to the bottom of the hole, then up the annulus between the drill pipe and hole wall of the well, through a screen that separates the cuttings, and into holding tanks from which it is pumped back into the well. The mud is maintained at a specific weight and thickness to cool the drill bit, lubricate the drill string, seal porous rock zones, prevent blowout or loss of drilling fluid, and transport the cuttings resulting from the drilling to the surface for disposal. Various additives are used to maintain the drill mud at the desired viscosities and weights. Some additives that may be used are caustic, toxic, or acidic. The spent drilling mud and rock chips are stored in tanks for later disposal at an approved facility.

Water for drilling is hauled by truck to the rig storage tanks or transported by surface pipeline. Water sources are usually rivers, wells, or reservoirs. When the Forest Service holds the water permits for surface water (stock ponds), it must also approve such use. Water is continually being transported to the well site during operations. Although it will vary significantly from well to well, approximately 10,000 barrels of water may be required to drill and complete an oil or

gas well to the depth of 8,000 feet. If water is hauled by truck, a significant amount of traffic will be generated by transporting water to and from the drill site. More water is required if the underground rocks are fractured and drilling fluids are lost into the formation (lost circulation zone). Uncontrollable loss of drilling fluids may cause drilling to be terminated.

In some areas where drilling must penetrate clay and shale layers, oil-base drilling muds are often used instead of water-base muds after the surface casing has been installed and cemented. The oil-base muds prevent the clays or shales from swelling and caving into the borehole, which can result in the collapse of the borehole making it impossible to pull the bit out of the hole. High-pressure air is sometimes used in place of mud. The use of mud or air is largely dependent upon the target formation, drilling depth and type of completion desired.

As drilling progresses, additional casings of concentrically smaller diameter are lowered into the well and cemented in place until the final depth (target zone) is reached. During the drilling process, the drill string must be pulled from the well periodically to change the drill bit, install casing, or remove core samples from the wellbore. Core samples are analyzed to determine the type of rocks penetrated and their porosity, permeability, chemical properties, and hydrocarbon content. At periodic intervals, BLM personnel will conduct inspections of the drilling rig and operations to ensure compliance with the approved plans in the APD.

Drilling operations continue 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The crews usually work three eight-hour shifts or two 12-hour shifts a day. The greatest amount of human, vehicular, and equipment activity and accompanying noise, etc. occurs during the construction and drilling activities. A significant amount of traffic is generated by trucks hauling equipment and water, service companies delivering supplies and equipment and performing specialized work on the well, drilling crew shift changes, well treatment, and testing equipment, etc. There is a high level of human activity and use of heavy construction and drilling equipment during operations, which is accompanied by considerable noise and highly visible activity.

Upon completion of drilling, the well is “logged” and tested to obtain information about rock formation and production of fluids. After completion of the tests the drill rig and other equipment are removed. If oil and gas is not discovered in commercial quantities, the well is considered dry. The operator must comply with State and Federal Procedures for plugging a dry hole. If the well is capable of producing hydrocarbons it will likely be tested to determine if production is economic. Gas well testing generally requires flaring of test gas in large quantities for up to 30 days. Oil is produced into test tanks and the associated gas may be vented to the atmosphere or flared. If oil or gas is found in commercial quantities, the well is completed as a producer.

References: Forest Service Los Padres Oil and Gas EIS (Retrieved 12/4/06)

No Action

Under this Alternative, BLM would not authorize the drilling of these two wells. This would result in inability to extract the federal subsurface minerals.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Location and Physical Description

The Sespe Oilfield is located in the eastern portion of Ventura County, California, approximately 30 miles east of Ventura and 10 miles north of Filmore, CA. The proposed wells sites are located on Hopper Mountain. Hopper Mountain has moderately steep slopes, and elevations vary from 3,000 to 4,200 feet. The proposed well sites are surrounded on three sides by the Sespe Condor Sanctuary, and are within the Los Padres National Forest. However, they are not part of either since the well pad is located on private surface. The average annual rainfall for Ventura County is between 16 and 30 inches.

Air

The project area is within the South Central Coast Air Basin governed by the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District. The Ventura County Air Pollution Control District has had various Air Quality Management Plans since 1979. The last official revision was in 1997 and a 2004 revision to provide a process to achieve both federal and state ambient air standards is under review. The attainment status of the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District is as follows:

<i>Standard</i>	<i>State Ambient Air Quality Standard</i>	<i>Federal Ambient Air Quality Standard</i>
PM ₁₀	Non-attainment	Unclassifiable
PM _{2.5}	Non-attainment	Unclassifiable
Ozone 8-hour	Non-attainment	Unclassifiable

A state implementation plan (SIP) has been prepared for the planning area which identifies sources of emissions and control measures to reduce emissions.

References: <http://www.vcapcd.org/about.htm> (retrieved 1-30-07)

Soil

Soils on Los Padres National Forest are diverse and are a reflection of the soil parent material and landform processes. Climate is characterized by variable precipitation and temperature extremes. In this area the greatest threat posed to soil loss is downstream sedimentation and its effects on reservoir water storage life, and fish and wildlife habitat.

Soils influence the type of vegetation and many of the management opportunities and needs. About half of the soils of the Forest have relatively low productive capabilities and generally occur on steep slopes over hard bedrock. Highly productive soils occur on only 7% of the Forest; typically occur in the valley bottoms, on gently rolling hills. The rest of the Forest is rated as moderately productive.

Earthquakes and slope failures on the Forest can endanger both lives and property. Although the well-known San Andreas Fault crosses portions of the Los Padres National Forest, many other major faults and associated secondary faults are either active or potentially active. Unstable slopes occur widely across the forest, with more than 50 percent of the surface either extremely or highly sensitive to slope failure.

Water

The climate in coastal areas of the Los Padres National Forest is characterized as having long, dry, cool summer seasons with frequent ocean fog, followed by a shorter wet winter period with cooler temperatures. Much of the coastal area has average July Temperatures in the upper 60s to Low 70s F. In January, average low temperatures are in the 40s and 50s. Average precipitation in the western portion of the Forest is 15-20 inches annually.

National Forest System (NFS) lands are a major surface water source for 37 reservoirs within and near the project area that are used for municipal and agricultural water supplies. In most cases, runoff from NFS lands provides the only water source for this water-limited area. While 715,000 acre-feet of water are produced on the Forest, only 25 percent of that is currently available for consumptive uses. An estimated 25 percent of the consumptive water use is for domestic and 75 percent for agricultural uses.

Groundwater is used within the Forest for domestic purposes by private landowners and for administrative purposes (e.g., fire management, wildlife, and campgrounds). The total amount used for these purposes is unknown. There are no forest wide estimates on the total groundwater supply, due to the complexities of hydrogeology. Local water agencies have expressed an interest in developing Forest groundwater supplies.

The closest perennial drainage is Tar Creek. Tar creek is approximately 2 miles from the well pad and drains into Sespe Creek approximately 9 miles away.

Biological Resources

A biological evaluation was prepared for this project by McCormick Biological, Inc (*Biological Reconnaissance Survey Results for the Proposed Powell Wells 3 and 4, Section 34, Township 5 North, Range 19 West, S.B.B. & M. Ventura County, California*). A copy of the October 2006 report is attached. The following Biological Resources sections are based on the McCormick Biological, Inc Report; conversations between BLM biologist Amy Kuritsubo and USFWS personnel (Mark Hall, Jesse Grantham); site visits by BLM personnel (Gabe Garcia, Duane Christian, Amy Kuritsubo); and information provided by Seneca Resources (Tim Alburger, Fariba Neese).

The project is located in the lower foothills of the Transverse Range, north of the town of Fillmore, and adjacent to the Los Padres National Forest and Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge. Although the existing well pad is surrounded on three sides by the Sespe Condor Sanctuary, it is not part of the Condor Sanctuary since it is private surface and private mineral estate.

The proposed well location is not vegetated, but the area immediately surrounding the development consists of non-native grassland. The nearby foothills and canyons are a mosaic of chaparral, coastal scrub, riparian and oak woodlands. The non-native grassland community is dominated by dense stands of non-native grasses such as bromes (*Bromus* spp.), wild oats (*Avena*

barbata), foxtail (*Hordeum* spp.) and fescues (*Vulpia* spp.). Forbs typically present include filaree (*Erodium cicutarium*), fiddleneck (*Amsinkia* spp.) and several mustards. Canyon areas immediately adjacent to the well location include scrub oak, yucca, coffeeberry (*Rhamnus* sp.) and occasional grey pine.

Wildlife species likely to occur in the general project area would be similar to the adjacent Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge and Los Padres National Forest. Such species probably include turkey vulture, California condor, red-tailed hawk, golden eagle, California quail, common raven, brush rabbit, desert cottontail, California ground squirrel, Botta's pocket gopher, California pocket mouse, deer mouse, dusky-footed woodrat, coyote, gray fox, black bear, American badger, striped skunk, mountain lion, bobcat, mule deer, western fence lizard, side-blotched lizard, western skink, rubber boa, racer, gopher snake, common kingsnake, garter snake and western rattlesnake. The proposed well location provides limited habitat and is probably used by only a few of these species such as side-blotched lizard, pocket gopher, and a few bird species.

The general area provides important habitat to the California condor. The proposed project site is within suitable foraging habitat for California condors and condors are likely to forage in the vicinity of the project site. Four condors were observed flying immediately west of the well pad during a site inspection on 12 October 2006.

An active California condor nest is located several canyons southwest of the proposed well location, approximately 2 miles away.

Cultural Resources

The Spanish on an exploration trip up the coast of California were the first non-Indians to enter the central coast region during the mid-sixteenth century expedition lead by Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo (Portuguese explorer) sailing under the Spanish flag. Spain's interest in Alta California as a new place for expansion also became evident with increased military expeditions. Soon Spanish expeditions involved both military and religious goals. Captain Gaspar de Portola's land expedition in 1769 traveling north from San Diego to Monterey documented their encounter with the Ventureno Chumash at the rancheria of Santa Clara which was located near the present day city of Fillmore. The mission system founded by the Spanish with the goal of spreading Christianity to Native Americans took place from 1772 to 1834 when 21 missions were established. By the mid-1800s, the Spanish had lost much of their control over this area to Mexico (Grant, 1978).

The Chumash rancheria name sek'spe persists in the Ventura area to this day as a place name known as Sespe. The Ventureno branch of Chumash was well established along the Santa Clara and Ventura rivers as well as the Calleguas Creek vicinity (Grant, 1978). Their neighbors to the east were the Tataviam and the Gabrielino to the southeast (King & Blackburn, 1978). The Ventureno's covered mat houses resembled the rectangular dwellings of Tataviam. Most of the native settlements away from the ocean were not large (Grant, 1978).

Their subsistence practices consisted of a seasonal round of hunting, gathering, and fishing. Some primary plant foods in their diet were acorns, manzanita berries, soap plant bulb, and chia sage; while hunted animals consisted of deer, quail, rabbits, squirrels and fish. Some examples of goods manufactured and utilized among the Chumash included flaked stone tools, intricate basketry, tanned animal hides, ground stone tools, and the bow and arrow which was introduced

about 1500 years before present (Grant, 1978). Some prehistoric site types which typically occur in this cultural region include bedrock mortar and milling stone food processing stations, lithic scatters, village sites, and rock art paintings.

Agency field and record search investigations revealed no historic or prehistoric resources, National Register of Historic Places properties, or Native Americans traditional cultural properties in the project area and vicinity. Details of the investigations are documented in BLM cultural resource inventory report CA-160-C/V-476.

BLM provided correspondence pertinent to the proposed undertaking to several Native American councils, individuals, and tribal representatives as listed below in Section VII (Consultation and Coordination). As a result of this consultation, BLM received one response from the Santa Ynez Band of Mission Indians (Tribal Elders Council).

Specifically, the Tribal Elders Council was interested in getting copies of the archaeological investigations and any response we may have received from the Native American Heritage Commission. The Council had no record of the project area being spiritual or having ceremonial values to their people. They ask the BLM to consider having the presence of a Native American monitor during time of ground disturbance.

Range- Grazing activities are not present near or around project site.

Realty – New realty actions are limited in the area around the proposed project.

Recreation- The surrounding area provides an abundance of recreational opportunities such as hiking, OHV use, hunting and fishing. None of these activities are performed on the project site.

Socio-Economic – The current oil and gas leases in the Sespe Oil field produce approximately 390,000 barrels of oil per year and 895 million cubic feet of gas per day. The market value of these products is approximately \$30 million per year. These leases also provide approximately 25 jobs for the local economy.

Visual Resources- This proposed project is located in a Visual Resource Management class IV area. This classification provides for major modifications of the characteristic landscape. The level of change in the basic landscape elements due to management activities is high. Such activities may dominate the landscape and be the major focus of viewer attention.

Wilderness- The Sespe Wilderness is located immediately to the north and east of the proposed drill sites.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

Resources in addition to those discussed below were considered as a part of the scoping process. Those resources were dropped from further consideration once it was determined that there was minimal potential for them to sustain significant impacts. The following elements of the human environment are subject to requirements specified in statute, regulation, or executive order, and must be considered in all environmental assessments. Those elements that are affected are discussed below in greater detail.

<u>Critical Element</u>	<u>Affected</u>		<u>Critical Element</u>	<u>Affected</u>	
	YES	NO		YES	NO
Air Quality	—	<u>X</u>	Wastes, Hazard/ Solid	—	<u>X</u>
ACEC's	—	<u>X</u>	Water Quality	—	<u>X</u>
Cultural Resources	—	<u>X</u>	Wetlands/Riparian	—	<u>X</u>
Floodplains	—	<u>X</u>	Wild & Scenic Rivers	—	<u>X</u>
Native Amer. Concerns	—	<u>X</u>	Wilderness	—	<u>X</u>
T & E Species	<u>X</u>	—	Weeds	—	<u>X</u>
Environmental Justice	—	<u>X</u>			

Air, Soil, and Water

Impacts to Air Quality

The primary emission sources during any new construction will be from heavy equipment and fugitive dust. Other emission sources will occur during the operation and maintenance of the lease. These sources include oil facilities, waste gas facilities, operator vehicle traffic, natural gas fired steam generators, and flares. These activities may slightly increase amounts of dust and mechanical emissions but no significant cumulative impacts to air quality would be expected as a result of the implementation of the proposed action. All emissions sources will be permitted, inspected, and regulated by the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District.

References

<http://www.arb.ca.gov/desig/desig.htm> (accessed 11/6/2006)

<http://www.epa.gov/region09/air/sips/index.html> (accessed 11/6/2006)

Impacts to soil

Impacts to soil may occur due to the proposed action, although these impacts are not expected to be significant. Soil erosion is not expected to be a significant problem due to the gentle slopes and low rainfall. A primary source of concern when discussing soil is the potential of oil spills in the area described. All reportable spills will be responded to immediately upon notification from the operator. As a federal oil and gas operator it is mandatory to have a spill contingency plan in place when operations commence. This plan has to meet both BLM and EPA standards.

Impacts to water

The closest perennial drainage is Tar Creek, which is located approximately 2 miles from the well pad. Tar Creek flows to Sespe Creek approximately 11 miles from the well site. Standard drilling stipulations include measures designed to protect groundwater. Groundwater tables will not be affected by this project.

Biological Resources

Effects to vegetation will be minimal. The existing pad is not vegetated and no additional work space is required.

Effects to general wildlife are expected to be minimal. Since few wildlife species and individuals are likely to use the existing pad, the actual number of individuals impacted is expected to be very low. Animals can be crushed by equipment and vehicles during well drilling activities and burrows can be collapsed during site preparation. The additional human activity associated with well drilling may temporarily displace animals from the immediate area. Conversely, nighttime activity and light may attract other species. These impacts are not expected to be significant as the existing pad provides limited habitat, supports few wildlife species and individuals, and currently receives regular human visitation and activity associated with the existing wells.

Potential Effects to the California Condor

Although the targeted federal mineral estate for Powell Wells 3 and 4 is part of the Sespe Condor Sanctuary, there will be no surface disturbance to the Sespe Condor Sanctuary. The existing well pad is located just outside the boundary of the Sespe Condor Sanctuary, and it is on private surface. The Sespe Condor Sanctuary was established on January 23, 1951 by Public Land Order 6951 (PLO 6951). PLO 6951 withdrew public land within the Condor Sanctuary boundary from appropriation under the public land laws, and reserved the area as a condor sanctuary under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service. Certain sections, including section 34, were prohibited from surface use or invasion, and operations in all areas within the sanctuary were to remain ½ mile away from any nest that had been active within 3 years. The proposed project complies with these requirements. By placing the new wells on an existing pad, there will be no new surface use or invasion. The existing pad is located approximately 2 miles northeast of the active condor nest, meeting the ½ mile restriction.

BLM Biologist, Amy Kuritsubo, spoke with Mark Hall, Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge, on 2 October 2006 to get his comments on the possible impacts of the proposed wells to California Condors. Mark said that in the past there had been problems with young condors frequenting oilfield areas. However, this behavior has not been observed in the past two years, presumably due to the more mature age of the free-flying condor population.

Mark also spoke of the potential impact of oil leaks and spills on condors. He conveyed satisfaction with the existing lease practice to closely monitor all facilities for oil leaks, and to promptly clean and dispose of any discovered pools of oil. The diligence and prompt action by oilfield operators has appeared to significantly reduce the hazard of such spills and leaks to condors.

Seneca Resources recently completed drilling a non-federal well in the vicinity of the proposed wells. Seneca also has experience conducting ongoing oil production activities in the Sespe Oil Field and has successfully implemented the avoidance and minimization measures included as part of the proposed action. The BLM is not aware of any impacts to California condors from Seneca Resources operations on public lands in the past few years.

The addition of the two wells to the existing pad is not expected to affect the success of the active nest. The well pad is located approximately 2 miles from, and several canyons northeast

of, the active nest. The 15 existing wells were in operation during nest site selection and establishment. At least one well work-over has taken place on the existing pad during the 2006 nesting period and had no effect on the active nest. A private well, approximately 1.5 miles from the nest, was also drilled during the 2006 nesting period and had no apparent effect on the active nest. Based on aerial photographs, several other well pads occur within 1 mile of the active nest site. The condor chick successfully fledged in late October 2006. The presence of a more mature condor population is expected to provide an appropriate behavior example for the young condor, which includes avoidance of oil field areas.

BLM initiated informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on 7 November 2006 requesting written concurrence that the proposed wells were not likely to adversely affect the California condor. In a 20 December 2006 memorandum U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred that the two wells were not likely to adversely affect the California condor (Appendix A). They did caution that the conditions could change with the addition of naïve immature condors and that utmost caution and awareness on the part of Seneca Resources will be critical.

Cultural Resources

The project as proposed will not impact any known historic or prehistoric resources, National Register of Historic Places properties, or traditional cultural properties and places important to the Native Americans. The project will not impede access by practitioners to traditional religious sites.

The existing deep cut and fill in the mountainside slope by mechanized equipment when the oil well pad was originally excavated in years past precludes the need to culturally monitor the installation of the Powell Wells 3 and 4. Archaeological field investigations conducted by BLM and documented in inventory report CA-160-C/V-476, reveals no cultural resources to be present within or adjacent to the proposed oil well pads.

Range- There will be no impacts on grazing as a result of this action.

Realty – There will be no impacts on the limited realty actions as a result of this action.

Recreation- There will be no impacts on the limited recreation opportunities as a result of this action.

Socio-Economic – The proposed action will allow the existing leases in the Sespe Oil Field to continue oil and gas production at or above their current levels. This benefits the local economy, as well as the national supply of oil and gas.

Visual Resources- The wells will be drilled from an existing location the landscape on the proposed project site will be unchanged, and the impacts will be insignificant.

Wilderness- These two wells will be drilled from a location that is adjacent to wilderness. The drilling operations will take approximately 2 months to complete. For the duration of drilling a oil well drilling rig will be visible from viewpoints from surrounding wilderness. There will also be noise associated with the drilling of these two wells. The noise will be isolated to the immediate area surrounding the proposed well site. The impacts to wilderness from the proposed action are insignificant.

Cumulative Impacts

The effect of the two proposed wells, when taken together with the effects of other actions in the immediate area, will not have a significant cumulative effect on biological resources. The current pattern of development is to cluster several wells on a single pad and to place new wells on existing pads. At least one new well has been drilled on private lands and it is possible that other new wells will be drilled in the area. Any new wells are likely to be placed on existing pads alongside existing wells due to the topography, the Sespe Condor Sanctuary restrictions and the need to avoid impacts to condor foraging habitat. BLM is not aware of any new technology or field discovery that would suggest a substantial increase in the rate of well drilling on existing leases.

There will be no effect or cumulative impacts to cultural or traditional properties from the proposed action to develop two additional oil wells on an already existing large well pad which will be accessed via existing roads. Any future wells that may be developed would be subject to archaeological investigations to ensure avoidance or mitigation of cultural resources should sites be associated with potential wells in the vicinity. Recent archaeological record search revealed no known cultural resources to be present within one mile radius of the proposed action.

Approximately 15,000 acres in the Sespe area of the Los Padres National Forest may be offered in a proposed future oil and gas lease sale. It is estimated that access to these leases would be from adjacent private lands that already contain existing oil fields. The Los Padres National Forest has estimated that the proposed lease sale could result in 14 new wells, 3 new well pads and 14.5 acres of new surface disturbance in this area. This amounts to less than 0.1% of the 15,000 acres that would be offered.

Upon consideration of the preceding assessment and a review of other activities in the area, the proposed action is not expected to have any significant cumulative effects

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF NO ACTION

Air, Soil, and Water- The No Action Alternative would not affect air, soil, and water since the two wells would not be authorized.

Biological Resources- The No Action Alternative would not affect biological resources since the two wells would not be authorized.

Cultural Resources – The No Action Alternative would have no effect on cultural and traditional Native American properties.

Range- None

Realty – None

Recreation- None

Socio-Economic - The No Action Alternative may delay or prohibit the extraction of needed oil and gas resources at an important time for the U.S.

Visual Resources- None

Wilderness- None

V. MITIGATION

Air, Soil, and Water- No new mitigation measures will be implemented for air, soil, and water. All applicable laws and regulations will be set forth by both the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB).

Biological Resources- Measures to prevent impacts to biological resources have been built into the proposed action. No additional measures are proposed.

Cultural Resources – Considering that the two wells to be drilled are on an existing deep cut and fill mountain slope landform, the need for a late discovery clause for cultural resources was determined not necessary.

Range- None

Realty- None

Recreation- None

Visual Resources- None

Wilderness- None

VI. RESIDUAL IMPACTS FOLLOWING APPLICATION OF MITIGATION MEASURES

Except as noted below, the residual cumulative impacts of this project are expected to be insignificant.

Air, Soil, and Water- None

Biological Resources- Residual impacts are the same as described above as no additional mitigation measures are proposed. These residual impacts are not expected to be significant.

Cultural Resources - None

Range- None

Recreation- None

Visual Resources- None

Wilderness- None

VII. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Mark Hall, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge
Jesse Grantham, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Condor Recovery Program.

Adelina Alva-Padilla, Chairwomen
Tribal Elders Council Governing Board
Santa Ynez Band of Mission Indians

Lei Lynn Odom, Chumash Elder
Oceano, CA

Beverly Folkes
Chumash Representative
Thousand Oaks, CA

Julie Tumamait-Stenslie
Chumash Representative
Ojai, CA

Irvin Fernandez
Forest Service
Ojai Ranger District

Public Involvement, Contacts & Date of Contact

Los Padres Forest Watch
P.O. Box 831
Santa Barbara, CA 93102
Attn: Jeff Kuyper

On October 9, 2006, Jeff Kuyper of Los Padres Forest Watch requested a copy of the APD, Surface agreement, Lease Stipulations and Attachments, and a copy of the EA for this project. On October 13, 2006, BLM sent Mr. Kuyper a copy of the APD, Lease Stipulations, and Surface Agreement. On April 24, 2007, he was mailed a copy of the proposed EA for this project.

Elders Chairperson
Tribal Elders Council Governing Board
Santa Ynez Band of Mission Indians
P.O. Box 365
Santa Ynez, CA 93460

On November 2, 2006, The Tribal Elders Council Governing Board of the Santa Ynez Band of Mission Indians requested addition information on cultural sites in the area. BLM responded to this request on January 18, 2007 with a letter referencing the survey performed at the proposed well sites. On April 24, 2007, they were mailed a copy of the proposed EA for this project.

Mail List

Los Padres Forest Watch
P.O. Box 831
Santa Barbara, CA 93102
Attn: Jeff Kuyper

USDA- Forest Service
1190 East Ojai Ave.
Ojai, CA 93023
Attn: Irvin Ferdandez

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
P.O. Box 5839
Ventura, Ca 93005
Attn: Jesse Grantham

Elders Chairperson
Tribal Elders Council Governing Board
Santa Ynez Band of Mission Indians
P.O. Box 365
Santa Ynez, CA 93460

List of Preparers

Gabe Garcia
Environmental Protection Specialist (Project Lead)
Bureau of Land Management
(661) 391-6139
grgarcia@ca.blm.gov

Steve Larson
Associate Field Manager, Resources
Bureau of Land Management

Amy Kuritsubo
Wildlife Biologist

Bureau of Land Management

Denis Kearns
Botanist
Bureau of Land Management

Duane Christian
Archeologist
Bureau of Land Management

Diane Simpson
Recreation Planner
Bureau of Land Management

Jeff Prude
Petroleum Engineer
Bureau of Land Management

References

Grant, Campbell, *Chumash: Introduction and Eastern Coastal Chumash*. In Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 8, ed. by R.F. Heizer, Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution.

King, Chester and Thomas Blackburn, *Tataviam*. In Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 8, ed. by R.F. Heizer, Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution.

<http://www.arb.ca.gov/desig/desig.htm> (accessed 11/6/2006)

<http://www.epa.gov/region09/air/sips/index.html> (accessed 11/6/2006)

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(Retrieved 12/4/06)