

Western Energy Area F Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Montana Department of Environmental Quality Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement

Lead Agencies: U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE)
Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)

Cooperating Agencies: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management

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Abstract: This Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) describes the land, people, and resources potentially affected by Western Energy Company's (Western Energy) proposed new permit area (C2011003F), known as Area F (project or project area), at the existing Rosebud Mine, which surrounds the city of Colstrip, Montana, and the Colstrip Steam Electric Station (Colstrip Power Plant).

If DEQ approves the Area F permit and a new federal mining plan is approved as proposed, then 6,746 permit acres would be added to the Rosebud Mine. Mining operations in the project area would last 19 years, and about 70.8 million tons of recoverable coal would be removed. As with other permit areas of the Rosebud Mine, all coal mined in the project area would be sold and combusted locally at two power plants—the Colstrip and Rosebud Power Plants. At the current rate of production, mining in the project area would extend the operational life of the Rosebud Mine by 8 years.

The proposed project area is located in Rosebud and Treasure Counties adjacent to existing Permit Area C, about 12 miles west of Colstrip. The surface lands of the project area are privately owned, but the subsurface lands (coal) are owned by both federal and private entities and leased to Western Energy. Current land uses include grazing land, pastureland, cropland, and wildlife habitat. Tributaries of Horse Creek and West Fork Armells Creek, which lie within the Yellowstone River watershed, drain the project area. The area of disturbance within the project area would be 4,260 acres. Of these, 2,159 acres would be disturbed by mining; the remainder would be disturbed by highwall reduction, soil storage, scoria pits, haul-road construction, and other miscellaneous disturbances.

This EIS analyzes in detail the proposed project, known as the Proposed Action (Alternative 2), along with No Action (Alternative 1). One action alternative (Alternative 3), which modifies the Proposed Action to include additional environmental protection measures above those required under the Montana Strip and Underground Mine Reclamation Act, is also analyzed. DEQ and OSMRE, the two respective lead agencies, prepared this EIS in compliance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.