Fact Sheet

U.S. DEPARTMENT of ENERGY | Office of Legacy Management

Uranium Leasing Program

This fact sheet provides information about the Uranium Leasing program.

Program Overview

The Uranium Leasing Program (ULP) is managed by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Legacy Management (LM). LM is the caretaker of legacy sites that played a critical role in America's nuclear history, including land leased for mining.

Through the ULP, LM administers 31 lease tracts, all located within the Uravan Mineral Belt in southwestern Colorado. Of those 31 lease tracts, 29 are actively held under lease, while two tracts have been placed in inactive status indefinitely. LM's administrative duties include ongoing monitoring and oversight of leaseholder activities, as well as annual inspections to identify and correct safety hazards or environmental compliance issues.

Site History

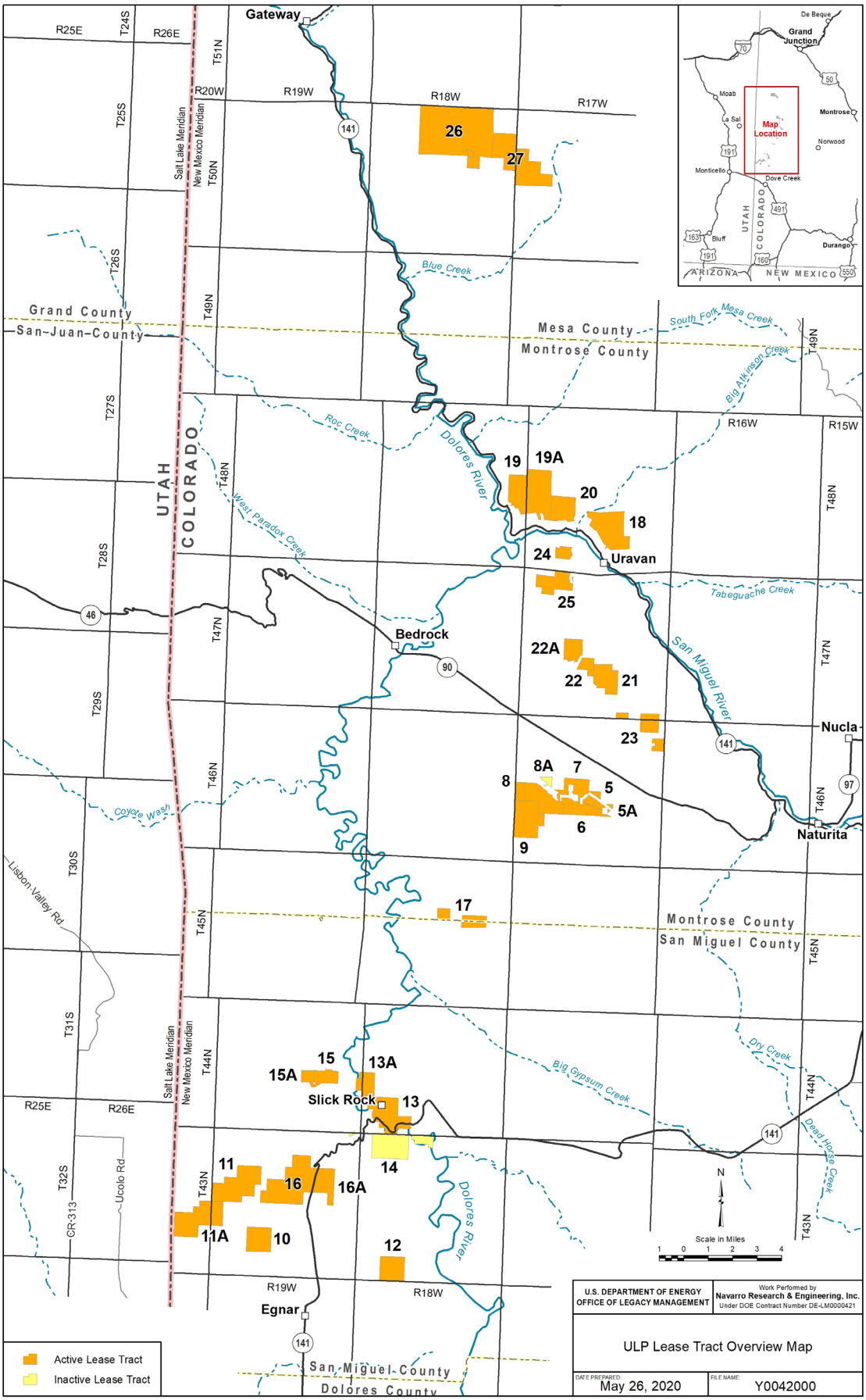
Legislation, including the Atomic Energy Act, authorized the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), the predecessor agency to DOE, to withdraw lands from the public domain and then lease the land to private industry for mineral exploration and mining of uranium and vanadium ores. Approximately 490,000 acres of land in southwestern Colorado, northern New Mexico, southeastern Utah, and central Wyoming were withdrawn from the public domain during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Most of this withdrawn land has been returned to the public domain, but approximately 26,000 acres in southwestern Colorado remain withdrawn and represent the current extent of the ULP lease tracts. From 1949 through 2008, AEC and its successor agencies administered three separate and distinct leasing periods (1949-1962, 1974-1994, and 1996-2008). In aggregate, these leasing programs produced over 3 million tons of ore, yielding approximately 14.5 million pounds of uranium and 75 million pounds of vanadium, which generated $66 million in nominal royalties to the federal government.

In 1994, all existing leases were allowed to expire to give DOE the opportunity to prepare a programmatic Environmental Assessment (EA) to determine if the leasing program should continue. The EA was finalized and approved in July 1995. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was issued in August 1995 for the continued leasing of DOE-managed lands for the exploration and production of uranium and vanadium ores. In 1996, DOE reoffered respective leases to the previous leaseholders. At that time, many former leaseholders opted out of the program, leaving just two leaseholders who decided to continue with their leases.



Uranium Leasing Program site, C-JD-5 Mine.

Continued



Uranium Leasing Program lease tract locations.

Land associated with the single, fully reclaimed lease tract in New Mexico was returned to the public domain in 1994. In 1999, under similar circumstances, lands associated with the five lease tracts located in Utah were also returned to the public domain.

In October 1994, DOE initiated a mine reconnaissance program to locate, identify, and quantify mine-related features associated with the abandoned uranium "legacy" mine sites located on the lease tracts. Based on the information gained during the reconnaissance activities, DOE systematically reclaimed all legacy mine sites located on ULP lease tracts, with the last ones being completed in 2011.

In 2005, DOE prepared a second programmatic EA to determine if the leasing program should continue. The EA was finalized and approved in July 2007. A FONSI was issued in that same month for the continued leasing of DOE-managed lands for another 10-year period for the exploration and production of uranium and vanadium ores. In April and June 2008, DOE executed new 10-year lease agreements.

On July 31, 2008, several environmental organizations filed suit against DOE and the ULP in federal court for the District of Colorado, claiming that DOE violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In April 2009, one additional environmental organization joined the lawsuit, claiming that DOE also violated the Endangered Species Act.

In early 2011, DOE began preparing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) to further assess the potential environmental impacts, including site-specific impacts, associated with program activities that were defined under a reasonable range of alternatives. At that time, DOE advised the leaseholders that it would not approve any plans (such as: exploration, development, mining, or reclamation) until the PEIS process was completed.

On Oct. 18, 2011, the court ruled that DOE violated NEPA by issuing the 2007 EA and FONSI instead of issuing an environmental impact statement. The court invalidated the July 2007 evaluation and finding, stayed the 29 leases in existence under the program, and prohibited DOE from issuing any new leases or approving any activities on lands governed by the program until an adequate environmental analysis was conducted.

DOE announced the public availability of the *Final Uranium Leasing Program Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement* on March 21, 2014. During the evaluation, DOE conducted a 109-day public comment period, held four public meetings in southwestern Colorado, and considered all public comments on the draft PEIS while preparing the document. The PEIS informed DOE's decision-making on the future course of the ULP. As a result, DOE issued a Record of Decision on May 6, 2014. Although the environmental impact statement was completed in 2014, the federal court did not dissolve the injunction until March 18, 2019.

Current Status

DOE continued the leasing program for an additional 10-year period and executed new 10-year leases in January and July 2020 with the existing leaseholders. The lessees may begin preparing exploration and mining plans as well as site-specific environmental assessments, all of which DOE must approve before any mining-related activities can begin. In addition, the lessees must provide reclamation bonds and develop site-specific mitigation plans for each mining activity. DOE reviewed and approved a notice of intent to conduct exploration work at the JD-7 mine, which was initiated and concluded fall 2025. As of late 2026, DOE, in coordination with Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining, and Safety, is reviewing a mine plan application at the JD-8 mine that was submitted in late 2025.

Contact Information

In case of an emergency at the site, contact 911.

LM toll-free emergency hotline: **(877) 695-5322**

Information about the Uranium Leasing Program is available at **www.energy.gov/lm/uranium-leasing-program.**

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