



**U.S. Department of Energy  
Office of Legacy Management  
Categorical Exclusion Determination Form**



**Program or Field Office:** Office of Legacy Management

**Project Title and I.D. No.:** Routine site activities at the Rio Blanco, CO, Site LM # 54-11

**Location:** Rio Blanco County, CO

**Proposed Action or Project Description:**

The Rio Blanco site is located approximately 50 miles north of Grand Junction, CO, in Garfield County. Three underground nuclear tests were conducted at the Rio Blanco Site in 1973. The Rio Blanco test was designed and conducted to evaluate the use of nuclear detonations to fracture the tight, gas-bearing sandstone reservoirs in the Piceance Basin for enhanced natural gas production. The site was decommissioned and reclaimed in 1976. To ensure that public safety is maintained, DOE annually samples 9 surface water locations and 6 groundwater wells, to monitor contaminant concentrations. Four of the groundwater wells are owned by DOE. Surface and ground waters are tested for tritium and by high-resolution gamma analysis. Based on prior year sampling data, purge water associated with the DOE wells is left on the ground to naturally infiltrate or evaporate. Occasional well maintenance may be required and might include replacing data loggers or pumps. Existing roads are used to access all sample locations.

In the future, when area gas wells within one mile of ground zero are in production, DOE will collect and test gas and produced water samples.

In addition to sample collection, DOE annually inspects a monument at ground zero.

No impacts were found to be associated with these activities.

**Categorical Exclusion(s) Applied:**

- B1.3 Routine maintenance actions
- B3.1 Site characterization and monitoring

For the complete DOE National Environmental Policy Act regulations regarding categorical exclusions, including the full text of each categorical exclusion, see Subpart D of 10 CFR Part 1021.

Regulatory Requirements in 10 CFR 1021.410(b): (See full text in regulation)

The proposal fits within a class of actions that is listed in Appendix A or B to 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D

To fit within the classes of actions listed in 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B, a proposal must be one that would not: (1) threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders; (2) require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators), but the proposal may include categorically excluded waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment actions or facilities; (3) disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA-excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases; (4) have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources, including, but not limited to, those listed in paragraph B(4) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B; (5) involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, such as those listed in paragraph B(5) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B.

There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal.

The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion. This proposal is not connected to other actions with potentially significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.25(a)(1)), is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)), and is not precluded by 40 CFR 1506.1 or 10 CFR 1021.211 concerning limitations on actions during preparation of an environmental impact statement.

Based on my review of the proposed action, as NEPA Compliance Officer (as authorized under DOE Order 451.1B), I have determined that the proposed action fits within the specified class(es) of action, the other regulatory requirements set forth above are met, and the proposed action is hereby categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

*Loacy A. Ribeiro*  
NEPA Compliance Officer:

*May 2, 2012*  
Date Determined: