

**DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY**  
**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

for

**Joint Environmental Assessment for the  
Chevron U.S.A., Inc. and Santa Fe Energy Resources, Inc.  
Midway Valley 3D Seismic Project, Kern County, California**

**AGENCY:** U.S. Department of Energy

**ACTION:** Finding of No Significant Impact

**SUMMARY:** The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), in conjunction with the Department of Energy (DOE), has prepared an Environmental Assessment (DOE/EA-1188) to identify and evaluate the potential environmental impacts of a geophysical seismic survey proposed by Chevron U.S.A., Inc. and Santa Fe Energy Resources (Chevron/Santa Fe) to take place on 31,444 acres of private lands, 6,880 acres of DOE lands within the Naval Petroleum Reserve No. 2 (NPR-2), and 3,840 acres of lands administered by the BLM in western Kern County, California. The proposed project, which encompasses approximately 66 square miles, is bounded by the community of Derby Acres on the west-central border, the City of Taft along the southern border, and the Naval Petroleum Reserve No. 1 on the northern border.

The Environmental Assessment (Assessment) analyzes the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects of the proposed action and the "no action" alternative. Other alternatives were considered and eliminated during the initial evaluation due to potentially greater impacts to the environment and/or costs to the proponents. Impacts from the proposed action to visual resources, health and safety, or cumulative impacts are not anticipated to be significant. Potential impacts from the proposed project would be unlikely to jeopardize the continued existence of the seven (7) threatened/endangered species listed by the state and federal governments that are found on and adjacent to NPR-2. Additionally, the potential impacts are unlikely to significantly affect the soils, air quality, and cultural resources. Any impacts would be reduced through active mitigation measures that are outlined in the Assessment. The Assessment does not consider California Environmental Quality Act requirements, which will be addressed by local permitting authorities including the City of Taft.

Based on the analyses provided in the Assessment, the DOE has determined that the proposed action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended. Accordingly, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required and the DOE is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact.

**PUBLIC AVAILABILITY:** The Assessment and the Finding of No Significant Impact will be distributed to persons and agencies requesting copies or know to be interested in or affected by the proposed action. Requests for copies should be made to:

Mr. Charlie D. Ellison  
National Environmental Policy Act Document Manager  
U.S. Department of Energy  
Naval Petroleum Reserves in California  
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**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** For further policy information on the DOE's National Environmental Policy Act process, contact:

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**SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION:** NPR-2 was created by an executive order by President William H. Taft on September 2, 1912 and is defined in 10 USC §7420. Under 10 USC §7420, the Secretary of Navy had exclusive jurisdiction and control over lands inside NPR-2 that were covered by leases granted under 30 USC §181 *et seq.* and was responsible for administering those leases. In 1920, the Mineral Leasing Act and Naval Appropriations Act were signed into laws allowing lessees the right recover all oil and gas deposits and the right to construct and maintain any infrastructure necessary to produce those deposits.

The result of the historical formation and development of NPR-2 is a checkerboard of land ownership, mineral leases, and land uses encompassing 30,181 acres. After several changes in administrative responsibility, The DOE now administers the 10,446 acres of land that are owned by the U.S. Government, with ownership of the remaining 19,735 acres being held by private parties or the City of Taft. The oil and gas rights for 9,224 acres have been leased to seven oil companies under 15 active leases administered by DOE, while the oil and gas rights for the remaining 1,222 acres have been retained by DOE.

Additionally, the Federal government issues and administers revocable permits to various public and private parties for surface rights to conduct a variety of activities on NPR-2. These activities occur throughout NPR-2 on leased and unleased lands and include agricultural and produced water disposal activities; maintaining oil, gas, and water pipelines; operating the California

Aqueduct and a pumping plant; and maintaining television cables, telephone lines and power lines.

**THE PROPOSED ACTION:** Chevron/Santa Fe have proposed to conduct seismic investigations to obtain information about potential oil and gas deposits in the Midway Valley Area.

The proposed action requires the authorization from BLM and DOE for portions of the geophysical operation on federal lands (3,840 acres of BLM lands and 6,880 acres of DOE lands within NPR-2). Permits for land use and geophysical operation crossing will be issued to the seismic contractor for Chevron/Santa Fe prior to the initiation of project related field operations.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:** Twelve environmental factors related to the proposed action evaluated in the Assessment include water resources, waste management, biota, geology and soils, air resources, visual resources, noise, flood plains and wetlands, cultural resources, land use, socioeconomics, and occupational health and safety.

Under the “no action” alternative, there would be no additional impacts beyond those incurred during normal operations at NPR-2. However, selection of this alternative would not allow seismic operations on NPR-2 and consequently, the area of the seismic project would be reduced and involve only private lands.

Under the proposed action alternative, Chevron/Santa Fe will carry out a 3-dimensional seismic survey using vibroseis trucks. The seismic data yielded by the proposed project will reduce the likelihood of several smaller seismic surveys being done in the area and thereby reducing the long-term impacts to listed species and their habitat. Drainages, flood plains, jurisdictional wetlands, and surface water quality would not be impacted by this project. Employment, traffic, air emissions, and waste generation would be slightly greater with the proposed action than they would be with the “no action” alternative. Impacts on soils and cultural resources would be unlikely. Following a Section 106 consultation with the California Office of Historic Preservation, the BLM, with DOE as a cooperating agency, has received concurrence with a determination of no-effect to cultural resources from the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). All negative impacts on endangered species/cultural resources will be reduced or avoided through active mitigation as described in the Assessment. Potential effects to biota would be minor, temporary loss and fragmentation of habitat from off-road vehicle travel and drilling activities, a small number of mortalities/injuries through vehicle strikes and the crushing of burrows by vehicles, and minor displacement of animals by all seismic survey activities.

There is a potential for adverse effects to threatened and endangered species from vehicle travel in the area, which may impact San Joaquin kit foxes, San Joaquin antelope squirrels, giant kangaroo rats, and blunt-nosed leopard lizards. Individual animals may be directly injured or killed by (1) vehicle strikes resulting from increased project related traffic and (2) through

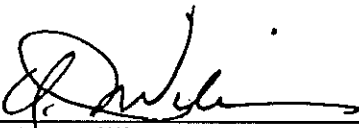
inadvertent entrapment in collapsed dens or burrows during off-road use of vehicles. However, preactivity surveys and on-scene biological monitoring will be conducted to minimize this type of disturbance. All mitigation/avoidance measures as outlined in Appendix A of the Assessment would be adhered to during vibroseis operations, cable layout, and other associated seismic survey activities.

Pursuant to Section 7(a) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, a formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) was concluded on November 12, 1996 concerning the Midway Valley 3D Geophysical Exploration Project proposed by Chevron U.S.A., Inc. and Santa Fe Resources in Western Kern County (see Appendix B of the Assessment). In that consultation, impacts and potential loss of habitat from seismic survey activities were deemed to be temporary and minor in nature. To reduce the potential for take of listed species and minimize the project impacts, DOE will comply with all the mitigation terms, commitments, and conditions set forth in the November 12, 1996 Biological Opinion.

**DETERMINATION:** Based on the results of the analysis in the Assessment, the Department of Energy has determined that the proposed 3-dimensional seismic survey does not constitute a major federal action that significantly affects the quality of the human environment within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, and the Department of Energy is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact.

Issued at Naval Petroleum Reserve Number 1, Tupman, California on

1/13/97, 1997.

  
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O. Jay Williams  
Acting Director  
Naval Petroleum Reserves in California