

Department of Health and Environmental Sciences

STATE OF MONTANA HELENA, MONTANA 59601

ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES DIVISION

Telephone: 449-3946

MAR 29 1980

A. C. Knight, M.D., F.C.C.P.
Director

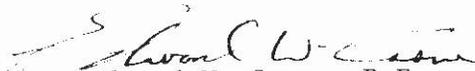
Honorable Thomas Judge, Governor, State of Montana, Helena, MT 59601
Honorable Ted Schwinden, Lieutenant Governor, State of Montana, Helena, MT 59601
Department of Community Affairs, Planning Division, Helena, MT 59601
Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Wildlife Division, Helena, MT 59601
Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Ecological Services Division, Helena, MT 59601
Department of Highways, Engineering Division, Helena, MT 59601
Department of Natural Resources, Energy Planning Division, Helena, MT 59601
Department of Natural Resources, Water Resources Division, Helena, MT 59601
Department of State Lands, Helena, MT 59601
Montana Bureau of Mines & Geology, c/o Montana Tech, W. Park St., Butte, MT 59701
Environmental Quality Council, Helena, MT 59601
Montana Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Program, Helena, MT 59601
Montana State Library, Helena, MT 59601
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region VIII, 1860 Lincoln St., Suite 103
Denver, CO 80295
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Building, 301 S. Park, Drawer 10096
Helena, MT 59601
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Federal Building, Room 3035, 316 N. 26th Street,
Billings, MT 59101
U.S. Federal Energy Administration, Region VIII, 1075 S. Yukon, Box 26247,
Belmar Branch, Lakewood, CO 80226
District Engineer, Omaha District, Corps of Engineers, Attn: Operations Office
6014 U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, Omaha, NE 68102
Soil Conservation Service, Box 970, Bozeman, MT 59715
Honorable John Melcher, United States Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510
Honorable Max Baucus, United States Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510
Honorable Ron Marlenee, House of Representatives, 1641 Longworth Building,
Washington, D.C., 20515
Rita Sheehy, 1701 Choteau, Helena, MT 59601
Earl F. Colton, D.V.M., P.O. Box 206, Kalispell, MT 59901
Dr. John F. McGregor, Room 301, Great Falls National Bank, Great Falls, MT 59401
Dr. John Newman, Box 3493, Butte, MT 59701
Charles Shields, 1755 W. Central Avenue, Missoula, MT 59801
William Spoja, Jr., Box 882, Lewistown, MT 59457
Grace M. Edwards, 140 S. Crestwood Drive, Billings, MT 59102
Big Horn County, Attn: Commissioners, Hardin, MT 59034
Big Horn County, Attn: County Agent, Hardin, MT 59034
Big Horn County, Attn: Superintendent of Schools, Hardin, MT 59034
Big Horn County, Attn: Sheriff, Hardin, MT 59034
Big Horn County, Attn: County Attorney, Hardin, MT 59034
Big Horn County Library, Hardin, MT 59034
Mayor M.D. Marshall, Box 848, Sheridan, WY 82801
Sheridan County, Attn: Commissioners, Box 686, Sheridan, WY 82801
Sanderson/Stewart/Gaston, 1629 Avenue D, Billings, MT 59102
Buchanan Enterprises, Box 1643, Great Falls, MT 59403
Cumin Associates, Attn: Cal Cumin, 528 Grand Avenue, Box 20762, Billings, MT 59404
Billings Gazette, Attn: State Editor, Box 2507, Billings, MT 59103
Hardin Herald, Hardin, MT 59034

Spring Creek EIS

Montana Coal Council, 2301 Colonial Drive, Helena, MT 59601
Decker Coal Co., Box 12, Decker, MT 59025
Decker Coal Co., Box 3049, Sheridan, WY 82801
Spring Creek Mine, Box 67, Decker, MT 59025
Allen Rowland, President, Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council, Lame Deer, MT 59043
Forrest Horn, Chairman, Crow Tribe of Indians, Crow Indian Reservation,
Crow Agency, MT 59022
Tri-County Ranchers Association, Attn: Ms. M. Hayes, R-Bar Ranch, Birney, MT 59012
Northern Plains Resource Council, 419 Stapleton Bldg., Billings, MT 59101
Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Interstate Land Sales
Regulation, 909 17th Street, Denver, CO 80202
Friends of the Earth, Ed Dobson, Box 882, Billings, MT 59103
Montana Stockgrowers Association, Box 1679, First National Bank Bldg.,
Helena, MT 59601
Jim Goetz, Box 1322, Bozeman, MT 59715
Tribune Capitol Bureau, 515 N. Sanders, Helena, MT 59601
Lee State Bureau, Box 4249, Helena, MT 59601
Environmental Information Center, Box 1184, Helena, MT 59601
Northern Rockies Action Group, 9 Placer St., Helena, MT 59601
Resources Education Foundation, Inc., Box 5027, Helena, MT 59601
Western Environmental Trade Association, 1804 11th Avenue, Helena, MT 59601
Defenders of Wildlife, Attn: Hank Fischer, 947 Rimini Court, Missoula, MT 59801
Montana Wildlife Federation, Box 4373, Missoula, MT 59806
Montana Chamber of Commerce, Box 1730, Helena, MT 59601
Montana Realtors Association, 2021 11th Avenue, Helena, MT 59601
Big Horn Health Corporation, P.O. Box 223, Hardin, MT 59034
U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, P.O. Box 30157, Billings, MT

This environmental impact statement has been prepared for the proposed Spring Creek Subdivision, Big Horn County, and is being submitted for your consideration. Comments and questions will be accepted for 30 days after the date of this publication. All comments should be sent to: Subdivision Bureau, Environmental Sciences Division, Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences, Capitol Station, Helena, MT 59601

Sincerely,


Edward W. Casne, P.E.
Chief
Subdivision Bureau

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND
ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
FINAL
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

SPRING CREEK

BIG HORN COUNTY

Pursuant to the Montana Environmental Policy Act, Section 75-1-201, et. seq., MCA, the Sanitation in Subdivisions Act, Section 76-4-101, et. seq., MCA, and the Water Quality Act, Section 75-5-101, et. seq., MCA, the following environmental impact statement (EIS) was prepared by the Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences (DHES), Environmental Sciences Division, concerning the request for administrative approval of Spring Creek, a proposed subdivision near Decker, Montana.

DESCRIPTION

The community of Spring Creek, Montana, is a subdivision proposed by Spring Creek Development, Ltd., Billings, Montana, west of the Tongue River Reservoir in southeastern Big Horn County. The 311-acre townsite would be on grazing land that was part of the 2,900-acre Montaylor Ranch. The townsite is about nine miles north of the Decker, Montana, post office, and about 30 miles north of Sheridan, Wyoming. It occupies parts of Sections 22, 23, and 26 of Township 8 South, Range 40 East, P.M.M. (map #1).

The purpose of the subdivision is to provide housing and services for miners employed at at least five coal strip mines in the immediate vicinity--the Decker Company's East, West and North Extension Mines, the Spring Creek Mine and the Pearl School Mine. Housing is almost non-existent in that part of Big Horn County, and miners and their families live, for the most part, in Sheridan. Developers see a Spring Creek population of about 3,000 by the mid-1980s.

Spring Creek will be developed in phases during the next several years. A total of 964 housing units are planned by 1985, including single-family units, townhouses, apartments, mobile homes and recreational vehicle space. A commercial center that includes law enforcement and emergency service headquarters is included in the master plan, as well as parks and recreational facilities.

The developers initially propose to build an 80-lot subdivision. This first phase includes: a lot for a mobile home park, one for a school, one for a church, one for a recreational vehicle (RV) park, one for a motel, one for a shopping center, 26 lots for multi-family and townhouses, four commercial lots and 44 single-family home lots.

The mobile home park will have 257 units, with 60 units constructed during Phase I. The RV park will be 54 units. The motel will have about 15 units and there will be about 40 multi-family and townhouse units. The shopping center will be 70,000-80,000 square feet.

The development's planning firm, Cumin Associates of Billings, completed an environmental impact assessment of the new town in 1978. On June 1, 1978, the county commissioners of Big Horn County conditionally approved the first phase of the Spring Creek Subdivision.

ALTERNATIVES AND RECOMMENDATION

The DHES had two alternatives: 1) Deny or 2) approve the proposed subdivision. The DHES recommended alternative #2.

REFERENCED MATERIAL

Pursuant to Rule V, Subsection (3)(a), ARM 16-2.2(2)-P2040, the DHES references all the material in the draft EIS.

LETTERS AND RESPONSES

The following includes the public responses to the draft and the DHES's answers to substantive questions and comments. The public comments were sent to the developer, and the developer's representative informed the department that the corporation had ".no comment regarding the responses and communications received in support of and in opposition to the issuance of a certificate for removal of the sanitary restrictions from Spring Creek...".

The letters and responses include:



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
222 North 32nd Street
P.O. Box 30157
Billings, Montana 59107

IN REPLY REFER TO:

1792 (962)

LETTERS AND RESPONSES

JAN 28 1980

Chief, Subdivision Bureau
Environmental Sciences Division
Montana Department of Health and
Environmental Sciences
Capitol Station
Helena, Montana 59601

RECEIVED

JAN 29 1980

MONTANA DEPT. OF HEALTH
& ENV. SCIENCES
SUBDIVISION BUREAU

Dear Sir:

Enclosed are the BLM comments on the Draft EIS prepared by your office for the proposed Spring Creek Subdivision, Big Horn County, Montana. In reviewing the EIS we did not locate any reference to the Decker-Birney Management Framework Plan, and we have included a copy for your files.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this document. If there are any questions on this material or information that is needed for preparation of the final EIS, please contact us.

Sincerely yours,

Kannon Richards
Kannon Richards
Acting State Director

Enclosures

cc:
DM, Miles City

BLM COMMENTS - PROPOSED SPRING CREEK SUBDIVISION

Geology

Page 7, Para. 2. The coal beneath the proposed Spring Creek townsite belongs to the people of the United States. While Robert Matson classifies the mining potential of the area as "medium to low, as compared to other minable deposits in the Decker area", it should be remembered that the deposits in the Decker area are among the best in the state. The coal potential of the area would probably receive a moderate to high classification if ranked against all deposits in the state.

Development of the area in question will preclude recovery of a large publicly-owned coal deposit. Other sites in close proximity to existing mines could be developed with much less impact on the coal resource. Should mining be precluded by development of the new town, the State of Montana could lose approximately \$22,300,000 in coal severance tax (at current prices). This should also be addressed in the discussion of Economics and Taxes, page 26 & 28.

Also, portions of the townsite are located over public minerals which are subject to the 1872 mining law allowing anyone to prospect and/or file a claim for a locatable mineral. Such mineral entries could cloud any clear title for the subject surface in the future. This should be addressed when discussing land use.

Page 7. It appears from geologic maps of the area (Consolidation Coal's CX Ranch Project and Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology's map of Canyon coal structure, etc., by Cole and Fine) that coal occurring under the proposed townsite is the Canyon coal and not the Dietz No. 2. The Dietz No. 2 appears to be burned under the townsite. The Canyon seam is the next stratigraphically lower coal.

Page 6, Para. 1. It is stated that the Powder River Basin has been filled with sediment "about 1,200 feet thick" and then it is cited that there are 3,400 feet of sediment in the uppermost formation alone.

Hydrology

Page 8. The coal occurring under the townsite is the Canyon seam, stratigraphically below the Anderson-Dietz₁-Dietz₂, which is to be mined at the Spring Creek Mine and the Decker mine.¹ Disruption of the Canyon aquifer by mining is unlikely from either of the mines.

Montana's DNRC has plans to repair or replace the Tongue River reservoir dam in the near future. The proposed high Tongue Dam would increase the spillway elevation of the reservoir to approximately 3,440 feet m.s.l. How will this affect the proposed town? DNRC proposes to finance the project by leasing and mining its coal in the existing reservoir bottom. The Canyon seam, if it exists underneath the reservoir, could logically be mined. The impacts on the proposed town of mining the reservoir needs to be addressed.

There is a question of the mining potential for the coal below the proposed Spring Creek townsite. According to the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology, the mining potential is low to none (Appendix A), whereas the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) says if the coal was ranked against minable coal in other parts of the state, the potential would be in the moderate to high range.

The BLM's statement that the state "...could lose approximately \$22,300,000 in coal severance taxes (at current prices)..." might be true, however it should also be considered that no matter where townsites are proposed in the Tongue River Reservoir area, there will probably be some loss of revenue from coal severance taxes due to the fact that coal--at varying depths--underlies most of the area. An exception would be if a townsite were built on reclaimed land--and that would seem to be a remote idea.

This would be a risk on the part of the developers.

Correction noted.

There was a typographical error. The statement should read "...about 12,000 feet thick...".

The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) is drafting six different plans that would repair or relocate the existing Tongue River Reservoir dam. The proposal for the high Tongue Dam, which would have raised the water level of the reservoir to a point where it would have inundated the sewage lagoons, was dropped. Included in the current proposals is one which would raise the level of the reservoir to within five feet of the lowest elevation of the area designated for the lagoons. If such a possibility were chosen, the developers have an alternate site for the lagoons, and have sent the DHES drawings of the site. The second site would be about a quarter of a mile west of the proposed site. Whatever proposal is chosen by the legislature, it will take about 10-12 years to drain the reservoir, mine the coal, build or repair the dam and refill it.

Wildlife

Physical Environment (Pages 3-5)

Para. 1. The strip mines will have an effect on wildlife, but with reclamation stipulations it need not be a permanent effect. Creation of a town will forever impact wildlife habitat whereas that destroyed by mining operations can eventually be replaced.

Comment noted.

Para. 2. The only mine to date which has greatly reduced or will reduce the carrying capacity of the winter ranges in the area is the Spring Creek Mine which is going to affect a sage grouse and antelope wintering area by destruction of the habitat needed by these species. The carrying capacity for surrounding areas is not reduced by the mine operations, but by the associated people activity. The Spring Creek townsite would greatly increase this impact, not merely fall within the zone of impact from the Spring Creek Mine as indicated.

Comment noted.

Para. 3 & 4. As Bob Phillips (U.S. Fish & Wildlife) states, once development begins on the townsite, antelope use of the winter range in the area of the townsite will cease. Increased traffic in the area has already decreased use of traditional ranges by interrupting movements between areas.

Comment noted.

Para. 5 & 6. These paragraphs gloss over the occurrence of species mentioned. Townsite development will affect an active golden eagle nest site approximately one mile north of the site. Increased human activity will probably cause abandonment of the nest, as there is no intervening topography to provide site security. The area below the dam has been identified as a bald eagle winter concentration area, just two to three miles from the townsite. Increased human activity will cause disturbance of the birds which are protected by the Endangered Species Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

Comment noted.

The people impact on all the species will cause a loss of all wildlife in the area by loss of habitat and security. Knapp's comments are well taken. People bring dogs and cats which also take their toll on wildlife when allowed to run loose. None of this has been taken into account.

Para. 9. True, increased human habitation is causing a problem but this is nowhere near the impact which would be experienced by the addition of 3,000 people into the area.

Comment noted.

Para. 10. This paragraph in itself is probably correct as stated, but it doesn't take into account the other impacts on the fishery. Namely, increased sediments and nutrients from the townsite runoff. Fertilization of lawns, surface runoff from streets, the use of sewage effluent for fertilization will all lead to increased algae building in the reservoir and eventual deterioration of the water quality.

The impact of stormwater runoff on water quality in the Tongue River Reservoir should be minimal. The proposed drainage plan allows for the use of natural grass-lined drainages to limit the amount of sediment and nutrients entering the reservoir. The impact of spray irrigation on the reservoir was addressed on page 10, Spring Creek Draft EIS.

LETTERS AND RESPONSES

Social and Economic

On Page 19, it is stated that the influx of people might lead to the election of new, pro-development officials. The DES needs to establish what has happened in other similiar situations.

Page 28. The gross proceeds tax could yield about 2 million dollars per year for Big Horn County to use to mitigate some of the non-lifestyle impacts (tax yield equal to 89 mills on 45% of gross receipts with contract sales prices of \$7.28 times 7 million tons per year). A discussion of this important revenue source should be included since in 1978 gross proceeds accounted for 25% of Big Horn County's assessed value.

A more complete discussion of social changes can be found in A Comparative Case Study of the Impact of Coal Development on the Way of Life of People in the Coal Areas of Eastern Montana and Northeastern Wyoming, final report by the Institute for Social Sciences Research, University of Montana, June 30, 1974. The Secretary of the Interior's office helped fund the study, thus the BLM's regional office should have a copy, if not, one can be obtained from the Montana State Library, Helena.

The gross proceeds tax relating to coal is a tax on the value of the extracted coal at the mine site. The amount of revenue is dependent on the amount of coal mined, thus an increase in production will result in an increase in revenue.

The money generated by the tax is proportioned among local school districts, the county, state and several other entities. Local schools receive the largest percentage of the revenue. Although the proposed town of Spring Creek would not directly benefit from this tax, it would indirectly through schools and county services.



MONTANA BUREAU OF MINES AND GEOLOGY
MONTANA COLLEGE OF MINERAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
BUTTE, MONTANA 59701
(406) 792-8321

January 3, 1980

LETTERS AND RESPONSES

Mr. Edward Casne
Subdivision Bureau
Environmental Sciences Division
Montana Department of Health and
Environmental Sciences
Board of Health Building
Capitol Station
Helena, Montana 59601

Dear Ed:

I recently received your EIS on the proposed Spring Creek
Subdivision, Big Horn County.

Perhaps the attached memo and map will be of some use.

Sincerely,

S. L. Groff, Director
and State Geologist

SLG:vaa

Attachments

MONTANA BUREAU OF MINES AND GEOLOGY

LETTERS AND RESPONSES

Montana College of Mineral Science and Technology
Butte, Montana 59701

Date: December 28, 1979

MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. S. L. Groff, Director and State Geologist

FROM: Robert E. Matson, Chief, Energy Division *REM*

COPIES TO:

SUBJECT: Proposed Spring Creek Community

This is in response to your request for information on the coal underlying the proposed Spring Creek Community in Big Horn County, Montana. For your information we are attaching a map (part of MBMG-32, Open-File Report, titled "Canyon Coal, Structure, Isopach, and Overburden Decker and Southern Tongue River Dam Quadrants, by G. A. Cole and D. E. Fine). The outlines of the Spring Creek Community have been superimposed on this map.

From this map you can determine that the overburden ranges from approximately 150 ft. to over 200 ft. Most of the surficial material in the Spring Creek Community area is made up of clinker from the Dietz No. 2 Coal bed which has burned over the entire area. Deeper coal under Spring Creek Community would be the Wall Coal bed about 200 ft. below the Canyon bed.

I have personally visited this site with Cal Cumins, a principal and promoter of this development. Except for the fact that this site overlies possible mineable coal, I believe this is a very good location for a town site.

See page 7 of the attached Department of Health and Environmental Sciences brochure. Note that we have changed the correlation for our current report which I believe to be accurate. The correct coal bed names have been written in.

REM:dsr
Enclosures

Comment noted (Appendix B).

Correction noted.

STATE OF MONTANA



DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

Helena, MT 59601
January 18, 1980

RECEIVED

JAN 21 1980

MONTANA DEPT. OF HEALTH
& ENV. SCIENCES
SUBDIVISION BUREAU

Mr. Ed Casne, Chief
Subdivision Bureau
Department of Health & Environmental Sciences
Helena, MT 59601

Dear Ed:

As requested, our department has reviewed the Spring Creek Sub-division in Big Horn County. In general, we conclude that the decision recommending the site be approved is the best of the alternatives facing us in this area. However, as a result of our review, we feel that the EIS is still somewhat deficient in dealing with the aquatic impacts on Tongue River Reservoir, both directly from possible contaminants originating from the subdivision and the impact of the increased population on the reservoir itself and surrounding fish and wildlife habitats.

We particularly believe that the subdivision planners should be aware of the potential problems surrounding Tongue River Reservoir itself. It is still a conceivable option that the reservoir would have to be breached, or, as it is being repaired, substantially lowered for a considerable period of time. No dependence on the reservoir, either for recreation or water supply, should be created until the problems of the reservoir are rectified. It is likely this will take a considerable period of time.

Our main concern from the terrestrial standpoint is a significant herd of antelope that has traditionally used this area as a winter range. It is perhaps inevitable that this loss once again be endured by the public; however, I would like to see some consideration given for compensating wildlife through a habitat protection program of some kind. Perhaps most realistic would be a commitment from those who must review, plan and comment on accommodating the population growth expected in that area. If, for example, one of the trade-offs could be a moratorium on random subdivision in favor of planned community growth and human population containment in those communities through zoning, perhaps the wildlife not directly affected by this particular subdivision could achieve a higher degree of protection through time.

Some specific comments raised by our regional staff are as follows:

LETTERS AND RESPONSES

5

Page 5, paragraph 2 discusses road locations and impacts on wildlife, leaving the impression that the developers have considered wildlife. The final sentence of that paragraph, however, acknowledges that no real consideration was given to wildlife.

Page 5, paragraph 5 discusses the impact on Tongue River Reservoir exclusively from the standpoint of increased fishing pressure. Our concern is that there may be other more direct impacts such as the adequacy of the sewage disposal system and the ability of the lagoons to prevent leakage or seepage from reaching the reservoir. As human population grows all through the Tongue River drainage, we cannot be too cautious and demanding in this aspect.

Page 9, paragraph 2 discusses the water supply system and mentions a 500,000 gallon storage reservoir. It is not clear whether this is a tank type storage or a small reservoir, and here again we would emphasize that it is important to recognize the existing problems with the permanence of the Tongue River dam.

Page 10, paragraph 1 discusses the effluent from the sewage lagoon and designates spray irrigation as the final disposition of that water. We would like to again emphasize that it is important to be certain that the lagoon can contain totally all of the effluent through the non-irrigation season and that the soils to be irrigated are such that there is no danger of runoff or percolation reaching Tongue River Reservoir.

Page 10, paragraph 4 discusses the landfill dump - a facility which is also relatively close to Tongue River Reservoir. We would like to see the alternative looked at of burying solid waste in the mine pits to ensure more permanent burial and perhaps better management of the landfill by preventing any unsightly litter or other refuse from detracting from the reservoir area.

Page 22 discusses law enforcement, stating that there is no full-time deputy sheriff in Decker. It is our information that at least last summer a deputy was assigned to Decker. We would also like to see mention made of the problems occurring in fish and wildlife enforcement, and at least a strong recommendation made that the Coal Board consider funding a Fish, Wildlife & Parks law enforcement officer in that area.

Page 26, paragraph 1 discusses Spring Creek residents and their likely recreation patterns. The EIS suggests that the big problem would be on private land, and we recognize this as a problem; however, we still contend that the major problem will be added human pressure on the resources of Tongue River Reservoir.

Comment noted.

The DHES review insures that sewage disposal will be done according to the law. The plans, as outlined in the draft EIS, guarantee the proposed sewage disposal system is engineered to meet state standards and, with proper operation, will not pollute local waters.

Water storage will consist of a 120,000-gallon steel tank. This will meet the latest American Water Works Association standards. It will be fed by four wells situated south of the townsite.

The lagoon system will consist of three cells and will be designed to handle a population of 1,888 persons or 188,880 gallons per day. The three cells will provide a total detention time of 180 days. The spray irrigation site is approximately a quarter of a mile from the reservoir. Four spray irrigation sites were evaluated by Hayden Ferguson of Montana State University, and the best site was selected. Neither runoff nor percolation from this site should endanger the reservoir.

In addition to the general reluctance on the part of mining interests to allow outside sources to dispose of refuse in a company landfill, there is a question of time. Most mining plans are designed for specific periods, while towns do not have beginning and ending dates. Thus, if a town used a mine site for disposal, the period it could use the landfill would likely be brief compared to a site not restricted by a mining plan.

Correction noted. Certainly the creation of Spring Creek will bring more people to the area, which will increase hunting and fishing pressure, thus creating a need for more fish and game enforcement personnel. As suggested in the comment, possibly the Coal Board can help the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks with funding.

Comment noted.

Mr. Ed Casne

3

January 18, 1980

Page 33 discusses environmental cost:benefits, but makes no mention of the problem of increased pressure on Tongue River Reservoir. It is likely that the management of this reservoir, with the increased human use, will be more costly, and in some way this should be figured into the cost:benefit ratios.

Comment noted.

We thank you for the opportunity to review the EIS, and hope our comments will be of use to you.

Sincerely,


James A. Posewitz, Administrator
Ecological Services Division

JAP/sd

cc: Environmental Quality Council
Keith Seaburg

BIG HORN HEALTH CORPORATION

LETTERS AND RESPONSES

P.O. Box 223

Phone (406) 665-3523

Hardin, Montana 59034

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14
JAN 4 1980

January 10, 1980

MONTANA DEPT. OF HEALTH
& ENV. SCIENCES
SUBDIVISION BUREAU

Edward W. Casne, Chief
Subdivision Bureau
Environmental Sciences Division
Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences
Capitol Station
Helena, Montana 59601

Dear Mr. Casne:

The Big Horn Health Corporation was formed by the Big Horn County Board of Commissioners to develop and provide comprehensive health care for the residents of Big Horn County. As such, we are interested in the development of the Spring Creek Subdivision and we appreciate an opportunity to comment on the Environmental Impact Statement prepared for that subdivision, as it relates to health care in the area.

The planning of primary medical services for the proposed townsite should consider several constraints. The new townsite falls within the Sheridan, Wyoming trade area, and obviously individuals living at that townsite will utilize Sheridan as a source of medical care. A recent community needs assessment completed in Big Horn County indicates that families living in the southeast portion of the County are highly unlikely to alter their care seeking patterns to any great extent. Physicians moving into the area on a private basis would be forced to invest heavily and risk a long practice building period. Experience in Colstrip and other rural areas throughout the state indicates that physicians are unlikely to initiate a practice under such conditions.

Comment noted.

The most common method used to provide services in such areas throughout the state is through placement of National Health Service Corps personnel. The County is eligible for such services, and two NHSC physicians are currently practicing in Hardin. However, federal guidelines for such placement are based upon a provider/patient ratio of 1 to 3000 or 3500 population. Considering that physicians employed on Indian reservations are not counted in determining eligibility, the County is currently eligible for three physicians. With four physicians now practicing off the reservation, one NHSC slot will be lost, and that physician will not be replaced when his tour of duty ends.

Comment noted.

Moreover, all assumptions based upon population ratios are open to error. The physicians working on the Crow Reservation, for instance, bring the total medical staff of the County to nine physicians and one physician's assistant. The fact that free medical care is provided to tribal members would argue against those neighboring reservation residents using a clinic in Decker. Established patterns of care across the Wyoming border would further isolate the clinic, meaning that it would have to draw its patient population almost exclusively from residents of the proposed town for quite some time.

A further consideration is purely economic. Big Horn County residents at present receive physician services for very reasonable fees. While there is a trade-off between free time and production for area physicians, nevertheless the low fees are based on high volume. An influx of several new doctors to the area would cut that volume, thereby causing the cost of medical care to rise. We do not see that possibility discussed by the developers as a concern.

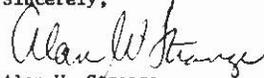
We would draw the following conclusions:

Comments noted.

1. It would be difficult and expensive to develop a private practice in the southeastern part of Big Horn County. The prospect of attracting private practitioners is slim.
2. The National Health Service Corps is an alternative to be considered. Under their system, however, the County already has more physicians than it is eligible for.
3. Primary care services will be necessary for the townsite, including ambulance services and emergency medical services. Nurse practitioners have been mentioned, but such providers currently work without legal sanction in the state of Montana and may not be clearly eligible for consideration.
4. Increasing the number of physicians to the number alluded to in the EIS would almost undoubtedly double the cost of obtaining medical care in Big Horn County.

The Big Horn Health Corporation would be more than willing to work with the developers of the new townsite as a part of our continuing planning process for the provision of quality health care within the County.

Sincerely,



Alan W. Strange
Executive Director,
Big Horn Health Corporation

AWS:mk

BIG HORN COUNTY



LETTERS AND RESPONSES

RECEIVED

HARDIN, MONTANA

P. O. Box 551
(406) 665-2255

JAN 10 1980
MDHES
Environmental Sciences Div.
January 3, 1980

Edward W. Casne, P. E.
Chief
Subdivision Bureau
Department of Health and Environmental Sciences
State of Montana
Helena, Montana 59601

RE: Environmental Impact Statement - Spring Creek Subdivision,
Big Horn County, Montana

Dear Mr. Casne:

I have received your above described EIS dated December 18,
1979.

I have a couple of comments to make in regard to page 22 and
page 23 thereof under the section entitled Law Enforcement.

A statement is made that "there is no resident deputy in the
Decker area".

Deputy Richard Kershaw has been stationed full time in the Decker
area and is currently living in Decker, Montana. He has been
stationed there full time since February 1, 1979.

Correction noted.

Further on page 23, you indicate quite boldly as follows, "there
is currently no lower Court system in the panhandle".

I take exception to that, as Hardin, being the county seat, is
the place of Government and it is necessitated by statute that
the Justice of the Peace must have his office here. Judge
Snively and also the part-time Justice of the Peace, Ray
Morissette, hold Court here in Hardin as necessitated by the
Statute.

Correction noted.

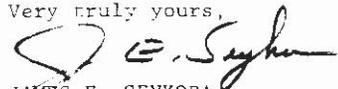
The statement that there is no lower Court system would seem
to anticipate that the Judge does not sit in Decker and hold
Court. That is not a requirement of the Statute, in fact, the
requirement is just the opposite as set forth above.

Page 2
Edward W. Casne, P. E.
January 3, 1930

LETTERS AND RESPONSES

Thank you for the opportunity to expand on my views of the
statements set forth in your DIS.

Very truly yours,



JAMES E. SEYKORA
Big Horn County Attorney

cc: Big Horn County Commissioners
Big Horn County Courthouse

Big Horn County Sheriff Walt Rider
Big Horn County Courthouse

Judge Kenneth Snively
Big Horn County Courthouse



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

225 NORTH ROBERTS STREET • (406) 449-4584 • HELENA, MONTANA 59601

January 4, 1980

Edward Casne
Dept. of Health and Environmental Sciences
Helena, MT 59601

RE: Spring Creek Subdivision

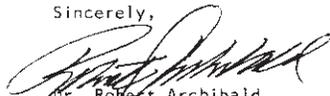
Dear Mr. Casne:

Thank you for the archaeologist's report on the Spring Creek Subdivision project. As the four prehistoric cultural properties will most likely be destroyed by the project activities or adversely affected by the higher resident population density I would request the applicant to hire a professional archaeologist to do the following:

1. Collect the surface remains from each site after establishing a control system for provenience.
2. At each site test for and excavate any buried cultural materials.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Dr. Robert Archibald
Acting SHPO

RA/TF/prb



GOV. THOMAS L. JUDGE OF
Designated Representative
LI 669 7919 (modified)

STATE OF MONTANA
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COUNCIL
CAPITOL STATION
Helena, Montana 59601

Telephone (406) 449-3742

LETTERS AND RESPONSES

Terrence D. Carmody, Executive Director

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Thomas G. Sarban, Chairman
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Arthur H. Stockton

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Edward Decker
Bill Dwyer

PUBLIC MEMBERS
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David Kinsing
Charles Miller
Nancy Starr

December 26, 1979

Mr. Edward W. Casne
Chief, Subdivision Bureau
Environmental Sciences Division
Department of Health and
Environmental Sciences
Helena, MT 59601

RECEIVED

DEC 28 1979

MONTANA DEPT. OF HEALTH
& ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
SUBDIVISION BUREAU

Dear Mr. Casne:

This will acknowledge receipt of the environmental impact statement
for the proposed Spring Creek Subdivision in Big Horn County.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this document.

Sincerely,

TERRENCE D. CARMODY
Executive Director

TDC:es

FINAL RECOMMENDATION

The DHES' final recommendation is the same as the recommendation for the draft EIS, approval of the proposed Spring Creek townsite.



MONTANA BUREAU OF MINES AND GEOLOGY
MONTANA COLLEGE OF MINERAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
BUTTE, MONTANA 59701
(406) 792-8321

February 20, 1980

RECEIVED

FEB 22 1980

MONTANA DEPT. OF HEALTH
& ENV. SCIENCES
SUBDIVISION BUREAU

County Commissioners' Office
Big Horn County Courthouse
121 West Third
Hardin, Montana 59034

Gentlemen:

I am forwarding a set of maps showing data for coal deposits in the Tongue River Area with designated data for the Spring Creek and Monument Creek (so called) townsites.

The map showing the circle for approximate townsite location clearly indicates the Spring Creek site has an 11:1 overburden to coal ratio, or an extremely low to no potential for surface mining. The Monument Creek site is more favorable for surface mining, but with 169 feet of overburden, it is highly unlikely to be mined in the near or medium term future. Please see the attached memo from Mr. David Fine of our Energy Division.

It is not always easy to understand what is shown on a map. I suggest looking over all three maps, consider that we used all available data and turned them out as quickly as possible. With this in mind, it may be necessary for participants in planning to arrange to visit our Energy Division and go over the maps when Messrs. Matson, Cole, and Fine are available.

It is noted that coal seams of various thickness, quality and depth underlie the whole area. That, however, does not mean that it is all mineable. My recommendation (based on present data) is that these sites be considered as favorable, contingent on Board of Health approval of other factors. Or, if agreement cannot be reached, we may be able to help in locating another site.

Copies of this letter, attached memo, and maps are being sent to the Board of Health and the BLM. I suspect we will get questions on the maps, but the surface mineability of coal relates to overburden thickness, seam thickness, and the rank, quality and extent of the coal seam(s) under consideration.

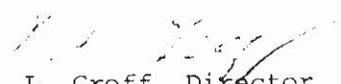
County Commissioners' Office
February 20, 1980
Page 2

It is understood that State approval of the High Tongue River Dam would have some bearing on the location of a townsite. The high dam would raise the water level; but on a practical basis, this construction could be twenty years or more in the future.

In Europe, existing towns are moved to permit surface mining of brown coal, and if necessary, moved back on the reclaimed mined areas. If advisable or necessary, this could be done in Montana. Considering available information, however, should the Spring Creek site meet the specific criteria of the Board of Health, then we should move ahead with it.

We will do our best to assist in resolving this issue, and will be acquiring additional data. Thanks are expressed to Mr. Fine and to the Energy Division.

Sincerely,



S. L. Groff, Director
and State Geologist

SLG:vaa

Enclosures

xc: Ed Casne ✓
Bob Bennett
Bob Matson

MONTANA BUREAU OF MINES AND GEOLOGY

Montana College of Mineral Science and Technology
Butte, Montana 59701

Date: February 20, 1980

MEMORANDUM

TO: S. L. Groff

FROM: Dave Fine, Energy Division *DF*

COPIES TO:

SUBJECT: Your request for information: Tongue River Area
(Spring Creek and Monument townsites)

I have made paper copies of the three maps you requested and have briefly summarized the information found on each map sheet.

First, the potentially mineable areas of the Canyon coal, Tongue River Dam Area map shows the outcrop of the Canyon coal bed and those areas where it is surface mineable. The dotted region represents the high potential areas, i.e. those areas with an overburden to coal ratio of less than 4.5:1. The moderate potential and no potential areas are self-explanatory.

The Monument Creek and Spring Creek townsites are also shown on this map sheet along with the thickness of coal, overburden, and overburden to coal ratio directly beneath the townsites. The Monument Creek townsite overlies the Dietz No. 1 and 2 coal beds which combine to make a 62' coal bed at a depth of 169' to the top of the coal. Here the Canyon coal is 18' thick at a depth of 330' to the top of the bed.

The Spring Creek townsite overlies 18' of Canyon coal at a depth of 200' to the top of the coal bed. Ten feet of Cook coal occurs 115' below the bottom of the Canyon coal in this area.

Second, the map of the structure and isopach of the Canyon coal, Tongue River Dam Area shows the thickness of Canyon coal in feet (i.e. the heavy line). Structure contours show the top of the Canyon coal bed in the subsurface. The outcrop of the Canyon is also shown along with known major faults and drill holes.

Third, the map of potentially mineable areas of Anderson and Dietz coals, Kirby Area shows the outcrop of the Anderson coal and the clinkered (burned) areas of the coal. The overburden to coal ratios are based on the combined thicknesses of Anderson and Dietz coals. Example, in an area where the Anderson is 25' thick and the Dietz beds are 45' thick, the overburden to coal ratio would be calculated on 70' of coal. The moderate potential areas exist only within the outcrop and burn areas.

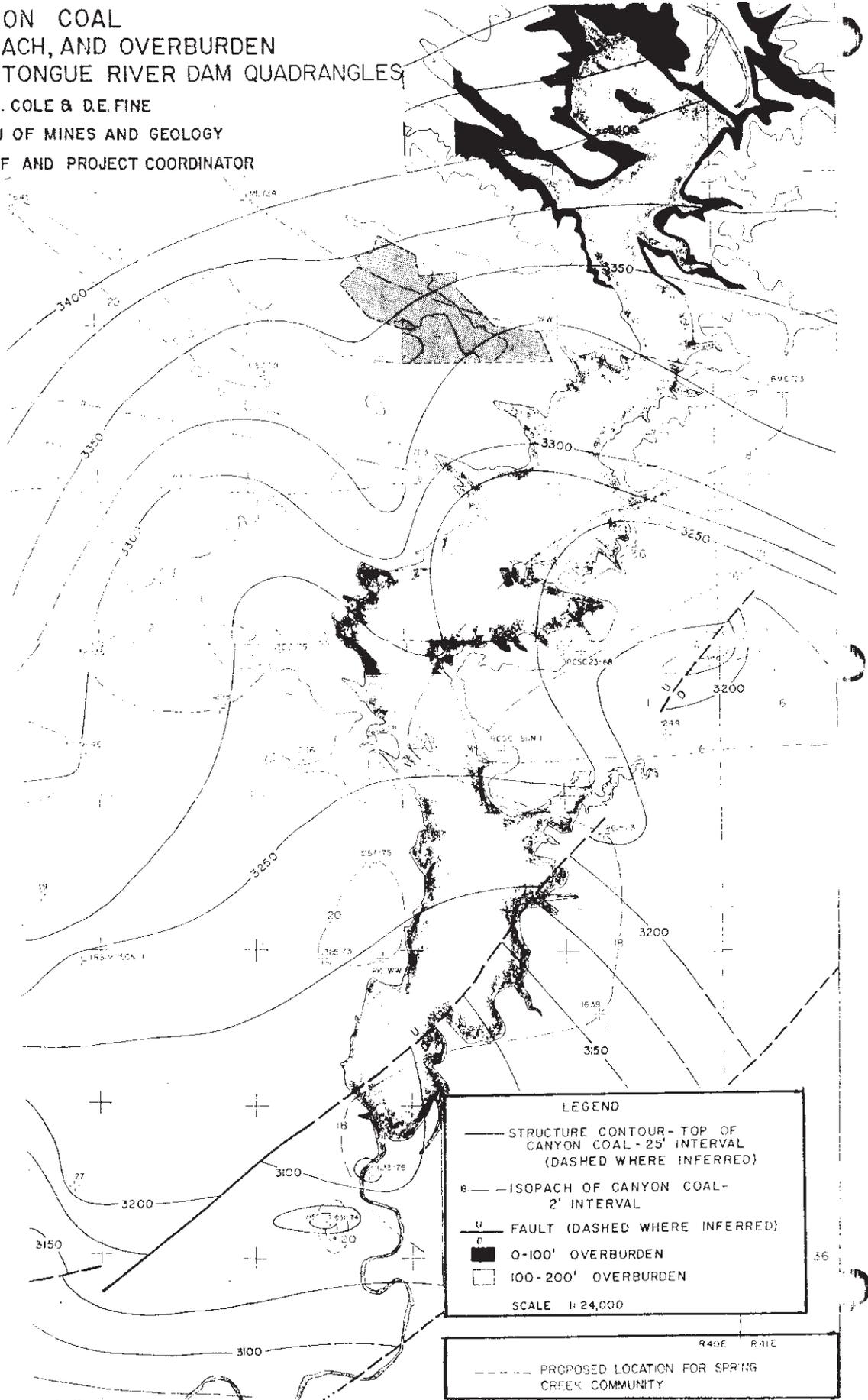
DF:vaa

CANYON COAL STRUCTURE, ISOPACH, AND OVERBURDEN DECKER AND SOUTHERN TONGUE RIVER DAM QUADRANGLES

BY G. A. COLE & D. E. FINE

MONTANA BUREAU OF MINES AND GEOLOGY

R. E. MATSON, CHIEF AND PROJECT COORDINATOR



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MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
Helena, Montana 59601

TO: