

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY DIVISION
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Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area & Obed Wild and Scenic River

June 2011

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Draft Non-federal Oil and Gas Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Park Friend,

Thank you for your interest in oil and gas management at Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area and Obed Wild and Scenic River. The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared a Draft Non-federal Oil and Gas Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (plan/DEIS) for Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area and Obed Wild and Scenic River.

The plan/DEIS has been developed for both units to aid in the effective regulation and management of non-federal (privately-owned) oil and gas operations. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and other laws, regulations, and policies, the NPS has evaluated potential impacts of the proposed plan to the natural, cultural, and human environment. The plan/DEIS evaluates a range of alternatives for managing non-federal oil and gas in the two national park units.

We are requesting your input on the proposed plan/DEIS for these park units. Comments will be accepted through August 16, 2011 and will help to provide essential input for the final plan/DEIS. Your participation is vital to the planning process. We look forward to your thoughtful review and comments on the management options in this plan/DEIS.

Sincerely,

Niki Stephanie Nicholas, Superintendent
Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area
Obed Wild and Scenic River



WHERE CAN I VIEW THE PLAN/DEIS?

Digital copies are available for download, online at: http://parkplanning.nps.gov/biso_obri_deis

CDs and a limited number of hard copies of the executive summary and the plan/DEIS may be requested by mail, as long as supplies last.

To request a copy, contact:

Niki Stephanie Nicholas, Superintendent, BISO
4564 Leatherwood Road, Oneida, TN 37841,
or by telephone at (423) 569-9778 or
Unit Manager, Obed Wild and Scenic River, 208
North Maiden St., Wartburg, Tennessee 37887,
or by telephone at (423) 346-6294.

While supplies last, the document can also be picked up in person at the above addresses.

PUBLIC MEETING DATES

ALL MEETINGS FROM 6-8PM

July 18, 2011

McCreary County Park Community Ctr
2255 North Hwy. 27
Whitley City, KY 42653

July 19, 2011

Scott County Office Building
2845 Baker Hwy.
Huntsville, TN 37756

July 20, 2011

Oak Ridge High School
1450 Oak Ridge Turnpike
Oak Ridge, TN 37830

July 21, 2011

Fentress County Courthouse
101 Main Street
Jamestown, TN 38556

July 22, 2011

Morgan County Board of Education
136 Flatfork Rd
Wartburg, TN 37887

If you need a hearing impaired translator for any of the public meetings, please call 423-569-9778 at least 4 days in advance of the meeting date to arrange this service.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

The plan/DEIS will be available for public and agency review and comment until August 16, 2011. During this period, the public is invited to identify any issues or concerns they might have with the proposed plan so the NPS can appropriately consider them in preparing the final plan/EIS.

You may provide comments using any one of the following methods:

- Attend the public meetings (see page 1 for dates and locations);
- Comment online at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/biso_obri_deis; or
- Mail comments to: Superintendent,
Big South Fork NRRRA, 4564 Leatherwood Road, Oneida, TN 37841

Comments will not be accepted by fax, email, or in any other way than those specified above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted.

Before including your personal information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be publicly available at any time. Although you may request in your comment that we withhold your personal information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

COMPLETION OF THE FINAL PLAN/EIS

The final plan/EIS will be prepared following consideration of all comments. Distribution of the final plan/EIS and NPS Record of Decision is anticipated for Summer, 2012. The timeframe for completion of the final document could vary from these estimates depending on the volume and content of public comments received during the review period for the plan/DEIS.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

DATES	PLANNING PHASE
June 17, 2011 to August 16, 2011	Public review and comment on plan/DEIS
Summer / Fall 2011	Incorporation of public comment
Winter/Spring 2012	Final Plan/EIS
Summer 2012	Notice of Availability and public final plan/EIS
Summer 2012	Record of Decision; plan implementation begins

PLAN/DEIS HARDCOPIES

Hardcopies of the plan/DEIS will be available at the following libraries:

McCreary County Public Library, Whitley City, KY

Oneida Public Library, Oneida, TN

Fentress County Public Library, Jamestown, TN

Wartburg Public Library, Wartburg, TN

Oak Ridge Public Library, Oak Ridge, TN

PROJECT BACKGROUND

At present, there are over 300 private oil and gas operations within Big South Fork NRA and Obed WSR. The plan/DEIS will guide the various management actions for current and future management of oil and gas operations at Big South Fork NRA and the Obed WSR. The forecast of oil and gas activity for the park units presented in the plan/DEIS estimates:

- Drilling up to 25 wells in Big South Fork NRA and Obed WSR over the next 15 to 20 years
- Amending or servicing up to 125 wells to restore or improve production
- Plugging of roughly 50 wells and surface reclamation of associated pads and access roads

The majority of oil and gas activity in the park units is expected to be associated with plugging oil and gas wells, surface reclamation, and production maintenance of existing producers, as opposed to new operations.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the plan/DEIS for Big South Fork NRA and Obed WSR is to analyze alternative approaches, clearly define a strategy, and provide guidance to ensure that activities undertaken by owners and operators of private oil and gas rights, as well as activities undertaken by the NPS, are conducted in a manner that protects resources, visitor use and experience, and human health and safety in the park units. A plan/DEIS is needed for the following reasons:

- Many of the past and existing oil and gas operations in these NPS units are adversely impacting resources and values, human health and safety, and visitor use and experience. Also, many are not in compliance with federal and state regulations, most notably, Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 9 Subpart B.
- Future oil and gas operations have the potential to damage park resources and values. The plan/EIS is needed to provide an efficient and effective strategy for park managers to ensure the units are protected for the enjoyment of future generations. There is also a need for park-specific guidance for the planning efforts of oil and gas owners and operators.

ALTERNATIVES

NEPA requires the development of potential alternatives for proposed plans. These alternatives are developed as a result of project scoping by the public, affected agencies, and the NPS. The alternatives are then evaluated within the NEPA document for their potential impacts on the environment and park resources and values.

This plan/DEIS presents and analyzes the potential impacts of three alternatives. Upon conclusion of the plan/DEIS and decision-making process, one of the alternatives will become the Non-federal Oil and Gas Management Plan for the park units and guide future actions for a period of 15 to 20 years. The alternatives are described below.

ALTERNATIVE A: NO ACTION (CURRENT MANAGEMENT)

- The NPS would continue to work cooperatively with the state on enforcement, but would be somewhat limited in its ability to conduct inspections and monitoring of all operations on a regular basis and would defer to the state to notify operators about compliance issues.

- Compliance for plans of operations for current operations and for new drilling and/or exploration would be conducted on a case-by-case basis in both park units with currently available staff and funding sources.
- Restrictions and protected areas identified in the current legal and policy requirements (CLPRs) for each park unit (including the NPS 9B regulations) would be applied to new operations.
- Plugging and reclamation activities would be guided by the 9B or state regulations, as appropriate, and compliance for these operations would be conducted on a case-by-case basis in both park units.

ALTERNATIVE B: COMPREHENSIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF 9B REGULATIONS AND A NEW MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR PLUGGING AND RECLAMATION

- The NPS would proactively pursue enforcement of the 9B regulations and plans of operations and provide clear communication with the public and operators about CLPRs, including the 9B regulations.
- For current operations, the NPS would continue to work cooperatively with the state on enforcement, but would conduct increased inspections and monitoring and identify sites that are found to be impacting, or threatening to impact, park resources beyond the operations area to bring these sites into compliance.
- The park would use the oil and gas management plan to proactively share information with the public about regulatory requirements, to seek out operators to ensure information is communicated clearly and effectively, and to focus staff resources on the implementation and compliance with the regulatory framework.
- A new management framework for efficiently completing compliance processes necessary for plugging and reclamation of wells would provide a method for evaluating the environmental compliance needs for future site-specific projects. Priority sites for plugging and reclamation would be identified using criteria described in this plan/EIS.

ALTERNATIVE C: COMPREHENSIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF 9B REGULATIONS, NEW MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR PLUGGING AND RECLAMATION, AND ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREAS (NPS PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE)

Alternative C would implement the same type of more proactive management described in alternative B. In addition, however, under alternative C:

- Designated Special Management Areas (SMAs) would protect those areas where park resources and values are particularly susceptible to adverse impacts from oil and gas development. SMAs would address natural and cultural resources such as water quality, geologic features, special management areas and historic sites. Operating stipulations would be applied in the designated SMAs to protect the resources and values of the park units unless other mitigation measures were specifically authorized in an approved plan of operations.

