



Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area and Obed Wild and Scenic River

Summary of the Non-Federal Oil and Gas Management Plan

2012



Dear Friends,

I am pleased to provide you with a summary of the non-federal (private) oil and gas management plan we prepared for Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area and Obed Wild and Scenic River. I want to thank all of you who worked with us during the preparation of this management plan. With your help, we now have a plan that will guide future management of activities associated with development of private oil and gas rights within the parks. The details of the plan and specific requirements for oil and gas owners and operators at the two parks are described in this easy-to-follow document. The National Park Service looks forward to working more closely with our stakeholders, including oil and gas owners and operators, to ensure the ongoing protection of the natural and cultural resources of both parks for generations to come while providing reasonable access to private mineral rights.

Sincerely,



Niki Stephanie Nicholas, Superintendent

Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area
Obed Wild and Scenic River
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Table of Contents

Introduction	p. 3
Why did Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area and Obed Wild and Scenic River prepare an oil and gas management plan?	p. 4
How does the plan protect park resources while allowing oil and gas wells to be drilled?	p. 6
Where are the Special Management Areas and how much of the parks are included?	p. 10
How does the plan address what happens when a well is no longer producing and it needs to be plugged?	p. 12
What other measures are included in the plan?	p. 14
What other guidance and regulations need to be followed when drilling a well or operating oil and gas production facilities?	p. 16
Where can I get more information?	p. 18
APPENDIX A	
Detailed Information for Non-federal Oil and Gas Mineral Rights Owners and Operators	p. 19



Introduction

In early 2012, the National Park Service published an oil and gas management plan for Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area and Obed Wild and Scenic River (hereafter referred to as, “the parks”). This plan is a comprehensive guide for the use and management of private oil and gas operations within the parks. It covers such topics as oil and gas exploration, drilling, production, permanent closure or “plugging,” and site reclamation. This plan identifies the requirements that oil and gas operators need to meet as well as the steps the National Park Service will be taking to proactively enforce existing oil and gas regulations. Some of these steps include additional inspections and site monitoring, better communication with site owners and operators, and new procedures for efficiently plugging abandoned wells. The new plan also sets aside “Special Management Areas” to protect areas of the park that are particularly vulnerable or susceptible to adverse impacts from oil and gas development.

This guide should answer many of the questions that you, as owners, operators, or stakeholders might have about the plan and its processes. At the top of each section in this document, there is a question followed by detailed information pertaining to that specific topic or issue. Feel free to go directly to the topics that are of most interest to you. The appendix provides more technical materials targeted for oil and gas owners and operators. Contact information for park specialists is also provided.

Why did Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area and Obed Wild and Scenic River prepare an oil and gas management plan?

Currently, privately-owned oil and gas resources can be found in more than a dozen parks. The owners of these resources are required to follow regulations and associated guidance to explore for oil and gas, drill and produce wells in the parks, and to eventually plug the wells once they are no longer in use and reclaim the sites. The National Park Service has its own regulations that cover oil and gas operations in parks, often referred to as the “9B regulations.” Individual states also have regulations that must be followed.

Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area and Obed Wild and Scenic River currently contain more than 43% of all the private oil and gas operations found on National Park Service lands (see Figure 1, below). Several of the wells already developed in these parks have had problems with spills or accidental releases.

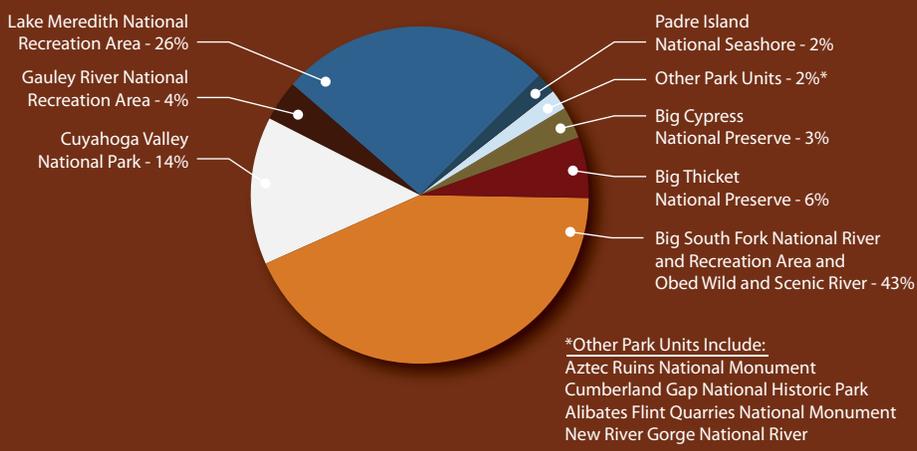


FIGURE 1 ▶ Pie Chart showing percentage of oil and gas operations found on National Park Service lands.

As a result, the parks wanted to be certain that any current and future oil and gas operations within park boundaries have minimal impact to environmental resources and park visitors. Previously, there was no comprehensive plan to explain the requirements of oil and gas owners or operators to protect these resources. So the parks worked on developing a plan to manage the oil and gas operations located within their borders, and they held several meetings to gather input from the public. In July 2012, the final oil and gas management plan/environmental impact statement for both parks was released to the public. A detailed description and draft of the plan can be found on the web at http://parkplanning.nps.gov/biso_obri_final_ogmp. A paper or CD copy of the plan can also be obtained by contacting the Park Superintendent, and one CD is provided in the back pocket of this document.

Cumberland River
flowing through the
rocky landscape ▼



How does the plan protect park resources while allowing oil and gas wells to be drilled?

Under the oil and gas management plan, the National Park Service will proactively pursue enforcement of the current regulations governing oil and gas operations in national parks. The National Park Service will also provide clear communication with the public and oil and gas owners and operators about any legal requirements including the National Park Service regulations for oil and gas operations within national parks (the “9b regulations”) and any policies that must be followed for oil and gas operations in parks. These existing requirements and regulations are discussed in more detail on page 16 of this document. The National Park Service will work in cooperation with the state to enforce regulations and will conduct increased inspections and monitoring to identify sites that are impacting or threatening to damage park resources. Any operations that are found to be a significant threat to park resources will be suspended. A solution will be identified and owners or operators will be required to carry out the solution. A new procedure, or “management framework,” for the permanent closing or “plugging” of wells and reclamation of sites will also be implemented. It is expected that under the plan, more acres will be reclaimed and restored to their natural state than will be disturbed for new oil and gas exploration or development.

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More information ►
on plugging and
reclamation is
available in the
2012 final oil and
gas management
plan/environmental
impact statement on
pages 71-80.

Additional ►
information on
Special Management
Areas can be
found in the 2012
final oil and gas
management plan/
environmental
impact statement on
pages 83 – 90.

A very important part of the plan is the designation of Special Management Areas. These are areas that are particularly susceptible to adverse impacts from oil and gas development and that are considered important to park ecology and resource protection. These areas would be protected by identifying setbacks or other requirements to reduce impacts of oil and gas operations. The table on the following pages presents these Special Management Areas and provides the reason why each of them was chosen for protection. The extent of all Special Management Areas in the parks is depicted on the map on page 10 of this document.

Special Management Areas

PROPOSED SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA	WHY IT WAS INCLUDED AS A SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA IN THE PLAN
BIG SOUTH FORK NATIONAL RIVER AND RECREATION AREA	
<p>Sensitive Geomorphic Features</p> <p>These include: Rock Shelters, Arches, Chimneys, Natural Bridges, Falls, Windows</p>	<p>Sensitive geomorphic features, especially arches and chimneys, are particularly sensitive to oil and gas operations. Some of these features are in their end stages of existence, are relatively fragile, and are susceptible to erosion.</p> <p>Features such as rock shelters are also important because they provided shelter for humans and possible habitat for threatened and endangered species of plants and animals that require protection by regulation and/or National Park Service management policies.</p>
<p>Cliff Edges</p> <p>These include areas mapped by the National Park Service during development of the General Management Plan for Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area.</p>	<p>Cliff edges are defined as the exposed, rocky, sparsely vegetated, sandstone outcrops along the rim of the gorge. They can be found along the main gorge of the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area and up the valleys of many tributaries. They are home to threatened, endangered, and/or state-listed species. These resources must be protected based on regulatory requirements and/or National Park Service management policies.</p> <p>Cliff edges are often associated with important archeological resources and sites eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places that contribute to the cultural characteristics of the park. Cliff edges also provide a prime scenic resource at the park that is essential to the visitor experience of the gorge.</p>
<p>State Natural Areas</p> <p>These include Honey Creek and Twin Arches Natural Areas.</p>	<p>The 109-acre Honey Creek Natural Area was set aside primarily because of its rich forest communities that have been undisturbed for many years, as well as its many geological formations. The area is extremely scenic, with lush vegetation, streams, a waterfall, rock shelters, and picturesque views of the gorge and river. The area contains a high diversity of species, including threatened species listed under the Endangered Species Act.</p> <p>The 1,500-acre Twin Arches Natural Area was set aside primarily to protect the two geological formations that give the area its name. This area protects the largest natural bridge complex in Tennessee, and one of the largest such complexes in the world. A high diversity of species exists within the area, including threatened and endangered species listed under the Endangered Species Act, or by the Tennessee Division of Natural Areas and Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission. Scenic views of the surrounding forested upland and creek gorges are common.</p>

Continued, next page ►

PROPOSED SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA	WHY IT WAS INCLUDED AS A SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA IN THE PLAN
BIG SOUTH FORK NATIONAL RIVER AND RECREATION AREA, Cont'd	
<p>Special Scenery</p> <p>This includes areas within the parks that are identified by a viewshed analysis done by an operator as part of the required permitting for the operation.</p> <p>Specific examples of special scenery that could be included in this Special Management Area include Twin Arches, Honey Creek Overlook, Angel Falls Overlook, Maude's Crack, Sawtooth, and Yahoo Falls.</p>	<p>The General Management Plan identifies areas of special scenery as sites and areas that are either especially scenic themselves or offer prime scenic views. Scenic enjoyment is the priority in these areas, and visitors are expected to experience the setting without being disturbed by unrelated human activity. The potential for oil and gas operations to affect the special scenery, or the views from these areas, is a concern. In addition to the views of or across the gorge, there is also some concern that views from the river up to the plateau could be affected by such operations. Some areas of special scenery have already been identified, and the analysis required by an oil and gas operator would help identify additional areas where viewsheds could be affected.</p>
<p>Managed Fields</p> <p>This includes the managed fields identified in the Fields Management Plan that occur in the vicinity of private mineral interests.</p>	<p>The Big South Fork Fields Management Plan identifies long-term objectives to (1) restore disturbed lands to natural conditions, (2) enhance habitat for game and non-game wildlife, (3) preserve cultural landscapes, and (4) enhance recreational opportunities. Oil and gas operations in the vicinity of these fields could preclude the National Park Service from meeting these objectives.</p>
<p>Visitor Use/Administrative Areas</p> <p>These include areas identified in the General Management Plan as First Order Development and Visitor Use Zone (readily accessible concentrations of visitor or administrative facilities)</p> <p>Specific examples include the Bandy Creek, Blue Heron, and Headquarters areas.</p>	<p>Visitor experiences and values (enjoyment of plant and animal biodiversity, visual quality, natural quiet, night sky, etc.) occurring in visitor use areas, must be protected from all potential impacts, including oil and gas operations.</p> <p>Facilities and private holdings within the park unit, as well as health and safety of park visitors and staff, must also be protected from all activities, including oil and gas operations.</p>
<p>Trails</p> <p>This includes all designated trails identified in the General Management Plan.</p>	<p>Visitor experiences along trails of the park unit must be protected from all potential impacts, including oil and gas operations.</p>
<p>Cultural Landscapes and Cemeteries</p> <p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 56 known cemeteries in the park 19 cultural landscapes including four that are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places 	<p>Cultural landscapes and cemeteries within the park must be protected from all activities, including oil and gas operations. Cemeteries are important to the local communities and families often visit the graves.</p>

▲ Special Management Areas table continued

**PROPOSED SPECIAL
MANAGEMENT AREA**

**WHY IT WAS INCLUDED AS A SPECIAL
MANAGEMENT AREA IN THE PLAN**

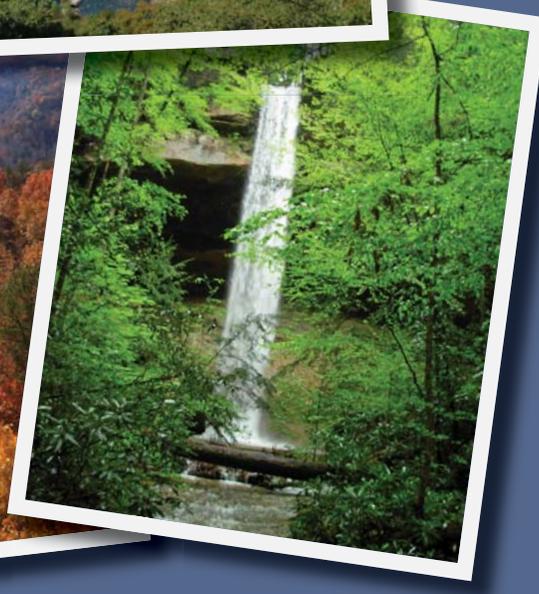
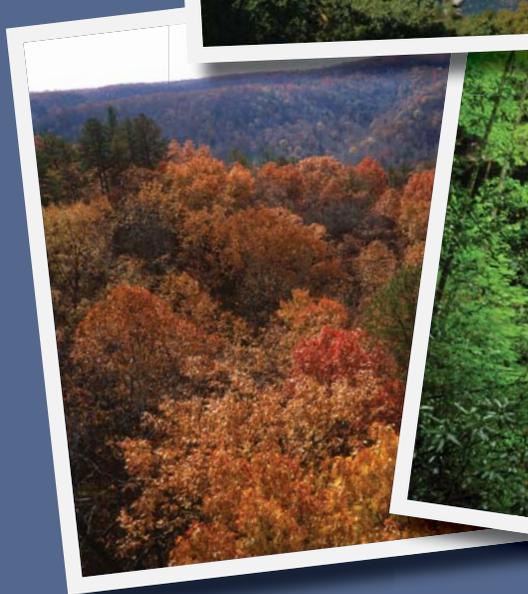
OBED WILD AND SCENIC RIVER

Obed Wild and Scenic River

This includes all federally owned land within the boundaries of the Obed Wild and Scenic River.

Because the Obed Wild and Scenic River was established as a narrow corridor centered on surface waters, there is the potential for oil and gas operations to impact the values identified when the park was included in the Wild and Scenic Rivers system. Currently, most deeds restrict oil and gas operations to areas outside the park. However, establishing all federally owned lands within Obed Wild and Scenic River as a Special Management Area provides upfront guidance to operators with mineral rights below these lands.

▲
Special Management
Areas table continued



▲
Photos, clockwise from top:
The Cumberland River flowing through the Big South Fork
National River and Recreation Area; Yahoo Falls; Big South
Fork Landscape in fall

Where are the Special Management Areas and how much of the parks are included?

The total area of the park covered by Special Management Areas is presented in the figure below:

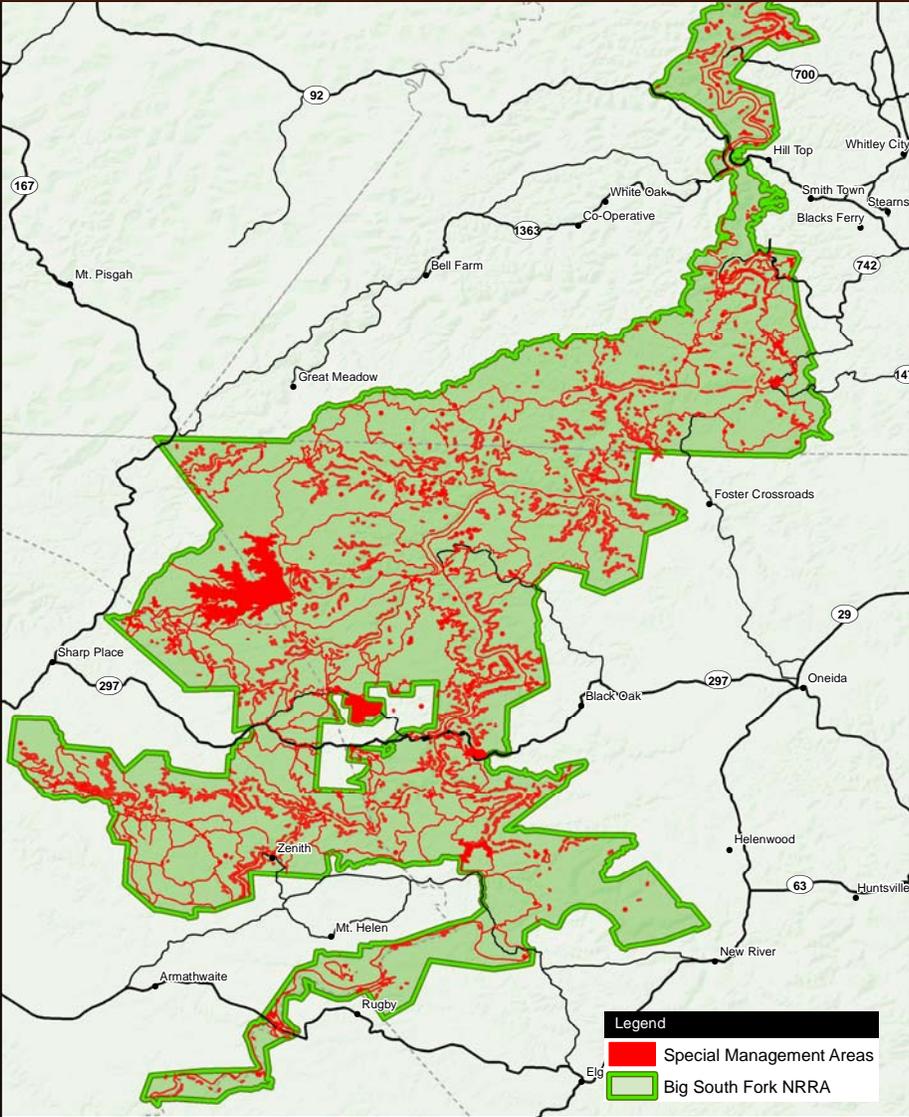


FIGURE 2
Special Management
Area locations

In some cases, the National Park Service identified setbacks from a Special Management Area boundary to ensure the resources or values of concern are protected. For example, when the plan says there should be “No Surface Use” within a 500- to 1,500-foot setback in visitor use/administrative areas, this means surface uses associated with oil and gas operations will not be permitted within the Special Management Area or within 500 to 1,500 feet of its. Although setback distances are prescribed for the Special Management Areas, these may be increased or decreased depending upon the specifics of individual oil and gas operations and resources found at the sites. Also, the surface use and timing restrictions developed for the Special Management Areas may be modified if appropriate mitigation is authorized. Any such changes would be coordinated by the NPS on a case-by-case basis during review and approval of a plan of operations (i.e., permit) for proposed oil and gas activities.

FIGURE 3
Comparison of private mineral acreage with operating stipulations under existing regulations and under the establishment of the new Special Management Areas

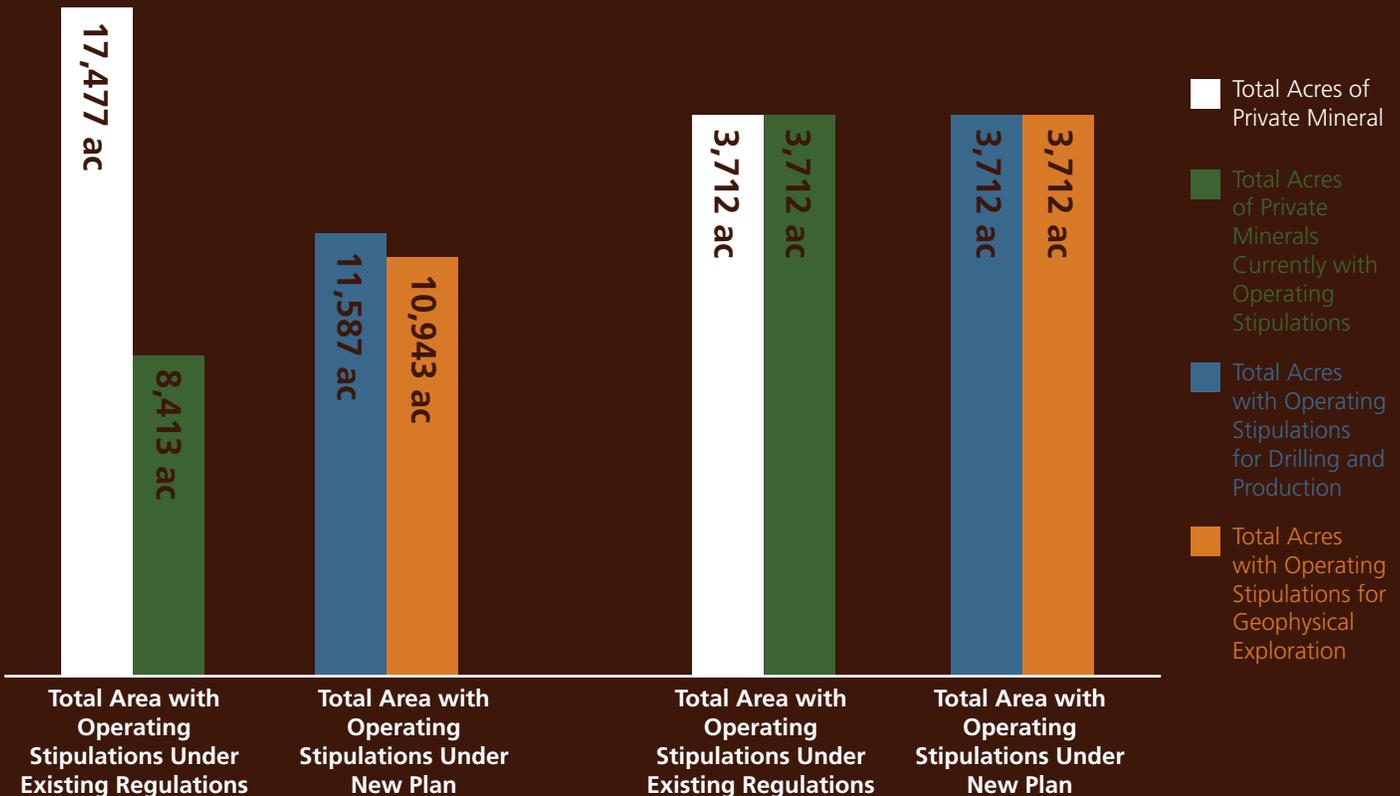
Special Management Areas

BIG SOUTH FORK NATIONAL RIVER AND RECREATION AREA

125,000 Total Park Acres

OBED WILD AND SCENIC RIVER

5,056 Total Park Acres



How does the plan address what happens when a well is no longer producing and it needs to be plugged?

As part of the oil and gas management plan, a process called the “new management framework” for plugging and reclamation of wells was developed. The new management framework provides the National Park Service an opportunity to use information in the oil and gas management plan and associated environmental impact statement to describe and analyze plugging activities in a more efficient manner. This is an important part of the oil and gas management plan because it will help to make the requirements for well closure and site reclamation easier to follow and to accomplish; and eventually, the park resources and values can be restored in areas where they have been affected. The specific steps to be taken under the new management framework are illustrated below.

New Management Framework Steps

- 1 IDENTIFY WELLS FOR PLUGGING AND RECLAMATION
- 2 PRIORITIZE WELLS FOR PLUGGING AND RECLAMATION
- 3 CONDUCT SITE SURVEYS OR ASSESSMENTS FOR SENSITIVE RESOURCES
- 4 DETERMINE APPROPRIATE ACCESS, WELL PLUGGING, AND RECLAMATION ACTIVITIES
 - a) Tailor the desired condition and the reclamation requirements to the site
 - b) Prepare a site-specific monitoring program
 - c) Determine subsequent monitoring or permitting needs
- 5 COMPLETE NECESSARY ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE ACTIVITIES
- 6 IMPLEMENT WELL PLUGGING AND RECLAMATION ACTIVITIES



More information about well plugging and the new management framework is available in the 2012 final oil and gas management plan/environmental impact statement on pages 71-80



What other measures are included in the plan?

Additional information can be found in the 2012 final oil and gas management plan/environmental impact statement on pages 80 – 82.

As part of the oil and gas management plan, other measures will be taken by the National Park Service so that park resources are protected and oil and gas owners and operators are better informed of their rights and responsibilities. Each of these new measures is explained briefly below.

Road Standards

The way in which oil and gas roads should be created and maintained will be determined on a case-by-case basis with the operator. The standards might be different depending on whether or not the roads are used only for oil and gas operations or if they also provide some sort of recreational or administrative access.

Increased inspections and monitoring, with enforcement if necessary

Site inspections and monitoring will occur more often than simply when problems and emergencies are reported or when requests are made from owners or operators. Inspections may be prioritized based on such factors as environmental or health and safety issues at the well sites, the presence of abandoned wells, road conditions, the presence of sensitive resources, and/or the status of compliance with state regulations. There will be other necessary inspections, such as periodic stormwater testing and surveys for invasive plant species.

Acquiring Mineral Rights on a Case-By-Case Basis

The National Park Service will consider the acquisition of mineral rights through existing land acquisition programs and seek to acquire mineral rights on a case-by-case basis from willing sellers.

Additional Planning Assistance for Owners/Operators

Additional planning assistance for owners/operators. National Park Service staff will now be better able to respond to requests from owners or operators. Assistance will include providing guidance developing permits (plans of operations), reviewing new plans of operations, and preparing environmental documents. Park staff will assist with reviewing and coordinating plugging and reclamation activities.

Increased Outreach and Education

The National Park Service will offer training and workshops, provide informational brochures, and conduct presentations. The National Park Service will increase coordination and collaboration with the state, oil and gas associations, and owners/operators by participating in meetings with them and working with them to make National Park Service requirements a part of their training programs.



▲ **FIGURE 4**
Examples of the outreach and education displays used at the open houses for this management plan.

What other guidance and regulations need to be followed when drilling a well or operating oil and gas production facilities?

There are additional requirements that need to be followed during oil and gas operations, geophysical exploration, drilling and production, and plugging and reclamation. These are referred to in the plan as “Current Legal and Policy Requirements,” and are a collection of current laws, regulations, orders, policies, and directives that govern private oil and gas operations conducted in the parks. These are important because they ensure protection of park resources, such as water quality, sensitive geologic features, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, and wetlands, from potential impacts related to oil and gas exploration and operation. These include the “9B regulations,” which require oil and gas operators to use technology and methods least damaging to resources at national parks to ensure the protection of human health and safety. The 9B regulations also require bonding or a similar type of security to ensure compliance with applicable regulations and to pay for possible damages. A more detailed explanation of these requirements can be found on Page 63, and in Appendix A and Appendix B of the 2012 final oil and gas management plan/environmental impact statement. The Oil and Gas Operator’s Handbook (CD copy included in the back jacket of this document) also includes an extensive listing of legal and policy requirements and mitigation measures that oil and gas owners/operators need to follow. These are indexed to the type of operation and type of resource for easier reference.



In addition, the plan includes specific mitigation measures to be followed if hydraulic fracturing were to be used (see page 64 of the 2012 final oil and gas management plan/environmental impact statement). These include requirements such as:

- Disclosure of chemicals used and approval of those by the National Park Service, with a requirement to use less toxic chemicals if feasible
- Well construction standards above those required by the state
- Comprehensive information on area geology and design of the operation so the risk to groundwater can be assessed and minimized
- A prohibition on use of water from sources inside the park
- Storage of any wastewater in tanks, with disposal outside the park only

It is important to note that changes could occur to oil and gas regulations over time. As of 2012, regulatory changes are being considered by both the state of Tennessee and the National Park Service, which is working on an update of its oil and gas “9B regulations.” Be sure to check with the National Park Service staff for the most current requirements.

Where can I get more information?

There are several National Park Service staff located at Big South Fork headquarters that have primary responsibilities for oil and gas operations. They are available to answer questions about this plan for both Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area and the Obed Wild and Scenic River. You may contact Chief of Resource Management at the address and phone number provided below.

ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER

Chief of Resource Management

Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area and Obed Wild and Scenic River
4564 Leatherwood Road
Oneida, TN 37841
(423) 569-9778

If you are not an oil and gas owner or operator, but would like more general information about oil and gas, go to the website sponsored by the NPS Geologic Resources Division that gives a good overview of the subject at http://nature.nps.gov/geology/oil_and_gas/index.cfm. The Oil and Gas Operators Handbook is available on a CD in the back pocket of this document and also on the website at http://www.nature.nps.gov/geology/oil_and_gas/op_handbook.cfm. You can find several sections in the handbook that give a pictorial overview of various types of oil and gas operations and good background information about the industry and the requirements for park protection.

If you are an oil and gas owner or operator and need help understanding the plan and finding the information, the website and handbook listed above are essential tools. Also, the appendix to this document has been developed for your use to answer more detailed questions and provide additional information about permitting and requirements for operating in the parks. You may also reach National Park Service agency staff at either park for more detailed instructions. For matters pertaining to oil and gas permitting, inspections and enforcement, please contact any of the staff listed above.

APPENDIX A

Detailed Information for Non-Federal Oil and Gas Mineral Rights Owners and Operators

This appendix has been included to provide additional detail for nonfederal oil and gas owners or operators. It addresses such questions

What do I need to do now?

What is the process for getting a permit under the oil and gas management plan?

Where can I get information needed to prepare my plan of operations?

How does the new well plugging framework affect me?

What do I need to do now?

The actions taken by you and the National Park Service are dependent upon the current operating status of your facilities. The table below has been developed as a roadmap to help you understand what actions you need to take if you are an owner or operator of an oil and gas operation at either park.

Current Operations - Operators with Valid State Permits

OPERATING STATUS	WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?
Plan of Operations is current / No environmental issues	Nothing except get familiar with the 2012 Oil and Gas Management Plan and 9B regulations
Grandfathered or exempt / No environmental issues	Same as above
Loss of grandfathered status (due to a change in operations or new operator of record) or no plan of operations	Plan of Operations and bonding required; environmental issues may need to be addressed before Plan of Operations and bonding is approved - See Chapter 6 of the Operators Handbook

New Operations

OPERATING STATUS	WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?
Geophysical surveys	Plan of Operations required – See Chapter 3 of the Operators Handbook and Special Management Areas in the 2012 Oil and Gas Management Plan
New drilling /production outside of park (directional drilling)	See Chapter 5 of the Operators Handbook; possible Plan of Operations
New drilling /production - inside park	Plan of Operations required – see Chapter 4 of the Operators Handbook and Special Management Areas in the 2012 Oil and Gas Management Plan

Plugging and Reclamation

OPERATING STATUS	WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?
Plugging / No Plan of Operations	See Chapter 7 of the Operators Handbook and New Management Framework in the 2012 Oil and Gas Management Plan
Plugging with Plan of Operations that covers plugging	See Chapter 7 of the Operators Handbook

For new operations, the Special Management Areas in the plan will need to be considered when developing your plan of operations. The Special Management Areas and associated setbacks and restrictions are discussed in the 2012 final oil and gas management plan/ environmental impact statement on pages 83 – 90 and in table 8 , which is partly reproduced below.

Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area

The following would be protected as noted unless other mitigation that protects Special Management Area resources and values is included and authorized in an approved plan of operations.

Sensitive Geomorphic Feature Special Management Area with 500-foot setback:

- No Surface Use (exploration, drilling, and production)

Cliff Edge Special Management Area with 100-foot setback:

- No Surface Use (exploration, drilling, and production)
- Any drilling that is allowed would be limited to dry periods

Managed Field Special Management Area with 100-foot setback:

- No Surface Use (exploration, drilling, and production)
- Setback only applies to drilling and production

Special Management Areas with Setbacks for Visitor Use/ Administrative Areas, and Trails

- Visitor Use and Administrative Areas:
 - 500-foot setback for geophysical exploration
 - 1,500-foot setback for drilling and production
- Trails:
 - 300 foot setback for all operations
- All:
 - No Surface Use (exploration, drilling, and production) in Special Management Area or setbacks
 - All operations would be limited during high visitor use or visitation periods (generally April through October)
 - Any drilling that is allowed would be limited to dry periods

Cultural Landscapes and Cemetery Special Management Area:

- 100-foot setback from cemeteries for all operations
- 1,500-foot setback from cultural landscapes for all operations
- No Surface Use (exploration, drilling, and production) in Special Management Area or setbacks
- All operations would be limited during high visitor use or visitation periods (generally April through October)
- Any drilling that is allowed would be limited to dry periods

State Natural Area Special Management Area:

- No Surface Use (exploration, drilling, and production) would be allowed in state natural areas

Special Scenery Special Management Area:

- Geophysical exploration would be allowed at any time
- Drilling activities limited during high visitor use periods (generally April through October)
- Requires viewshed analysis for production activities. This would be a geographic information systems analysis that would allow park managers to determine if the site lies within a viewshed that is visually sensitive to changes in the landscape. If so, the proposed location would become part of the Special Scenery Special Management Area.

Obed Wild and Scenic River

Obed Wild and Scenic River Special Management Area:

- No Surface Use (exploration, drilling, and production) would be allowed on any of the federal property within the boundaries of the

Although specific setback distances are prescribed for the Special Management Areas, these may be increased or decreased depending upon the specifics of individual oil and gas operations and resources found at the sites. Also, the surface use and timing restrictions developed for the Special Management Areas may be modified if appropriate mitigation is authorized. Any such changes would be coordinated by the NPS on a case-by-case basis during review and approval of a submitted plan of operations for proposed oil and gas activities.

How do I go about getting an approved plan of operations (permit) under the new plan?

Chapter 2 in the Oil and Gas Operator’s handbook describes the process used to obtain an approved plan of operations. The process for obtaining a permit under the new plan is outlined in the five steps listed below.

1. Demonstrate a bona fide ownership right
2. Contact National Park Service to conduct project scoping and site visit
3. Use the Environmental Screening Form that can be found in the Operator’s Handbook as a basis for discussion during the site visit and review
4. Apply for Temporary Permit for Data Collection and Survey in preparation for Analysis
5. Submit a plan of operations with detailed resource information or appropriate National Environmental Policy Act document

The basic procedure for processing oil and gas plans of operations is detailed in the table on the following page. See the Operator’s Handbook (Table 2.1) for additional information about typical response time to review submittals and factors that can affect the process.

Continued, next page ►

Table 2: Basic procedure for processing oil and gas plans of operations

1. Operator contacts park regarding interest in conducting oil and gas operations. Operator provides written documentation demonstrating right to conduct operations in the park.
2. Park provides operator with a CD ROM (or NPS web address) of the operator's handbook which includes the 36 CFR 9B regulations, plan of operations information requirements, and other pertinent information.
3. Operator meets with park staff to determine: resources that would be affected by the operation; environmental planning and compliance requirements; and affected local, state and federal agencies and conduct a site visit as needed to review operations.
4. Operator meets with park staff and affected federal, state, and local agencies to: identify resource issues, permitting requirements, impact mitigation strategies, and performance standards.
5. Operator submits written request for temporary access to gather basic information needed to complete the plan of operations.
6. Park issues 60-day temporary data collection permit which includes applicable park resource and visitor protection requirements.
7. Operator conducts necessary surveys as applicable, including natural and cultural surveys, and surveys and stakes the operations area.
8. Operator submits plan of operations to park.
9. NPS performs a completeness and technical adequacy review of the plan of operations. Park accepts plan of operations as complete or returns the plan to the operator with specific directions on how to revise the plan.
10. Operator revises plan of operations, as necessary.
11. Park staff prepares NEPA document (categorical exclusion, memo to the files, environmental assessment, or environmental impact statement) or adopts operator's NEPA document, incorporates other environmental compliance (National Historic Preservation Act, wetlands, floodplains, Endangered Species Act, Coastal Zone Management Act etc.), and initiates required consultations with other agencies. Park completes public review process, finalizes decision documents, and notifies the operator if the plan has been approved, conditionally approved, or rejected.
12. Operator agrees to conditions of approval (if any), submits applicable state and federal permits, and files suitable performance bond with the NPS.

Where can I get information needed to prepare my plan of operations?

Both the Oil and Gas Operator's Handbook and the 2012 final oil and gas management plan/environmental impact statement contain a large amount of information that can be used to help with the Plan of Operations process. The 2012 final oil and gas management plan/environmental impact statement includes descriptions of many park resources that could be affected by the operations, including Special Management Areas, in the Affected Environment chapter (Chapter 3), and information about potential effects can be found in the Environmental Consequences chapter (Chapter 4).

The Oil and Gas Operator's Handbook includes chapters that provide permitting checklists for geophysical operations (Chapter 3), drilling and production (Chapters 4 and 5), and plugging (Chapter 7). These chapters include detailed tables of operating stipulations and recommended mitigation measures for all phases of oil and gas development.

Well Plugging New Management Framework

The new management framework presented in the plan provides an expedited way to achieve compliance with regulatory requirements for plugging. As seen in the diagram below, oil and gas owners/operators are still responsible for the plan of operations and the cost of plugging and site reclamation, but the process allows an expedited compliance process that uses information already provided in the plan on the range of effects that could occur from the plugging operations. It is important to consult with park staff about any plans to plug wells.

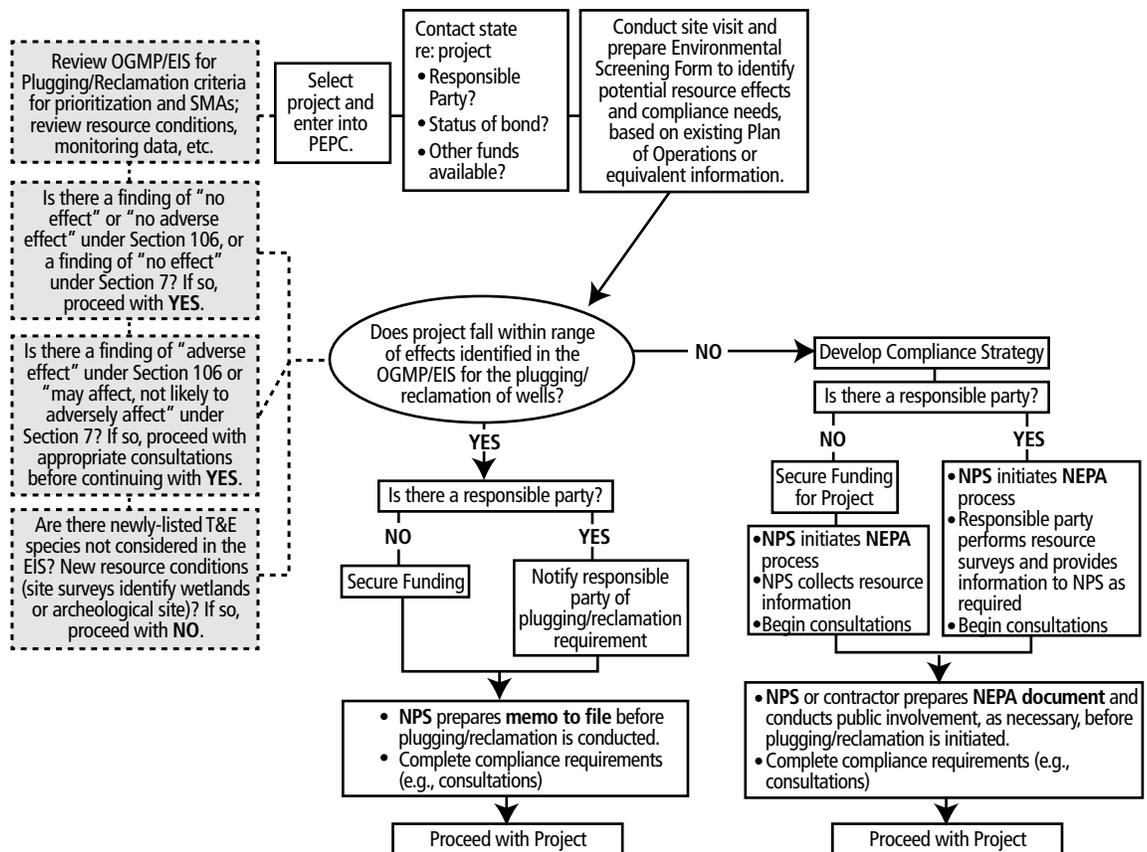


Figure 5: Well Plugging New Management Framework Decision Flowchart



U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area
4564 Leatherwood Road
Oneida, TN 37841

FIRST-CLASS MAIL
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