



# Well Plugging and Reclamation



## Planning Process

NPS expects to have an EA available for public review in January 2010. The EA would be available for public review and comment for 20 days, in accordance with NPS guidance on ARRA-related projects. Written comments received on the EA will be reviewed to determine whether any important new issues, reasonable alternatives, or mitigation measures have been suggested. If substantive issues are raised pointing to the potential for significant impacts, a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement would be prepared. Otherwise a finding of no significant impact would be prepared.

## For More Information

If you have questions about the project or to request a copy of the EA, please call Phyllis Trabold, Community Planner, at 423-569-2404, send a fax to 423-569-5505, send an email to [biso\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:biso_superintendent@nps.gov), or write to:

Superintendent  
Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area  
4564 Leatherwood Road  
Oneida, TN 37841  
Attn: Plug and Reclaim Abandoned Oil & Gas Wells

## Project Background

The National Park Service (NPS) is seeking comments on a proposed project to plug and reclaim abandoned oil and natural gas (gas) wells at Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area (Big South Fork NRRRA or the park unit). Oil and gas fields are located adjacent to and extend into the boundary of the park unit, which encompasses approximately 115,000 acres and more than 300 oil and gas sites in Tennessee and Kentucky.

The focal point of Big South Fork NRRRA is the massive gorge whose boundary is defined by the enabling legislation and represents roughly one-half of the total acreage in the park unit; the remaining acreage is considered the “adjacent area.”

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began to acquire property inside the legislatively mandated boundary of Big South Fork NRRRA during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Many of the pre-existing wells located within the boundary have been abandoned according to information from the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) and the Kentucky Department of Natural Resources (KDNR). The project will address at least 45 known abandoned wells at Big South Fork NRRRA, and possibly more. Two of these wells are owned by the NPS and will be plugged when they are no longer producing gas. Nine wells are located in the gorge where the minerals are owned by NPS.

These abandoned wells pose environmental risks and public safety threats, including resource damage from the release of contaminants as deteriorating pressure control equipment fails; subsurface contamination of groundwater absent proper well plugging; personal injury and property damage from spontaneous release of pressurized and highly flammable well fluids; and continued disturbance from unreclaimed oil and gas development. Some wells are located in areas easily accessible by hunters and others who visit the park, creating health and safety hazards for these users.

All of the wells would be plugged to NPS and applicable state standards. Upon completion of well plugging, the well sites would be reclaimed, including the removal of above ground structures and human-made debris that resulted from operations. Access roads that are no longer needed for future private mineral access or existing or proposed NPS roads or trails would be stabilized and allowed to re-establish into native vegetative communities or reclaimed with native vegetation.

The grassy area in the middle of this photograph is an abandoned oil and gas well access road at Big South Fork NRRRA.



Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area  
4564 Leatherwood Road  
Oneida, TN 37841



## Purpose and Need for Project

The purpose of the proposed action is to plug and reclaim at least 45 known abandoned wells. This project is needed:

- Because there is no responsible non-federal party to plug and reclaim these wells;
- To ensure protection of natural and cultural resources from the effects of these past oil and gas operations in Big South Fork NRRA; and
- To minimize human health and safety risks.

Action is also needed at this time because substantial funding has been made available through the 2009 enactment of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to plug and reclaim the majority of these wells.

## Issues and Impact Topics

Based on project scoping and consideration of the potential effects that could occur from plugging and reclamation activities, the following resources, values, and concerns have been identified for detailed evaluation in the environmental assessment (EA) being prepared per the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act:

- Soils/Geology
- Vegetation
- Wildlife
- State and Federally Listed Species
- Water Resources
- Wetlands
- Cultural Resources
- Visitor Use and Experience (including Health & Safety)
- Park Management and Operations

Other issues that will be addressed in the EA include, but are not limited to, effects on air quality, floodplains, soundscapes, and socioeconomics. At this time, it is anticipated that the proposed project would have temporary, negligible to minor effects on such resources and values. Depending on the results of public scoping, these issues could be considered but dismissed from detailed evaluation.

## Public Comment

Also known as “Public Scoping,” NPS is inviting the public to provide input regarding this project. Issues, concerns, and ideas from the public, government agencies, and organizations will assist NPS in preparation of the EA. Public comments will be accepted until November 6, 2009.

Comments may be submitted:

By mail to: Superintendent  
Big South Fork NRRA  
4564 Leatherwood Road  
Oneida, TN 37841  
Attn: Plug and Reclaim Abandoned Oil & Gas Wells

Online at: [www.parkplanning.nps.gov/biso](http://www.parkplanning.nps.gov/biso) (click on project)

By email to: [biso\\_superintendent@nps.gov](mailto:biso_superintendent@nps.gov)

Please be sure to include your full name and address with the comments so we may add you to our mailing list for information on the planning process.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.



Abandoned gas well at Big South Fork NRRA.

### KNOWN WELLS AND ACCESS ROADS TO BE PLUGGED AND RECLAIMED

