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August 22, 1990

NOTE

To: Dave Jorgenson
Rep. Moorehead's Office (225-4176 -- FAX 226-1279)

From: Bernie Hyde (208-5517)
Division of Hazardous Materials Management -- BLM

Re: Your Request for a Background Paper on the Clear Creek Issue

After our telephone conversation the other day, I asked our District Manager in Bakersfield to send a copy of the briefing sheet we use to inform citizens, interest groups and communities on the environmental and recreational issues associated with the Clear Creek Management Area, near Coalinga, CA. The briefing sheet sets out the position of the Bureau regarding our work with the Environmental Protection Agency in the Clear Creek area. We believe the attached is the most cogent, brief statement on the issue.

Please call me if you need further information.

Stock letter/Clear Creek

Thank you for your letter concerning the BLM's Clear Creek Management Area. This area, in San Benito and Fresno counties, covers about 48 square miles, and contains significant amounts of naturally occurring asbestos minerals.

Asbestos mining occurred in the area in the late 1960s and 1970s, but most of those operations are now closed (one mine is still active). In the meantime, numerous studies have determined that exposure to asbestos, in certain quantities, poses a legitimate public health hazard.

In 1980, elevated levels of asbestos were detected in water samples from the California aquaduct. This prompted Federal studies by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and BLM, beginning in 1983. The EPA and BLM concluded that some of these mines need to be reclaimed to reduce the amount of asbestos carried offsite by wind and water erosion. Two sites, the Atlas Mine and the Johns-Manville Coalinga facility, were added to the EPA's Superfund list.

In 1986, BLM issued a management plan for the Clear Creek area that included opportunities for public recreation, and those objectives were also included in an overall Hollister Resource Area Management Plan completed by BLM in 1984. However, both those plans acknowledged that the asbestos hazard existed and that additional studies were underway that might require changes in BLM's management approaches.

At present, EPA is in the final stages of preparing its Record of Decision that will determine what remedial actions are necessary. It is anticipated that EPA will require the BLM to find ways to minimize public exposure to asbestos in the area and require the responsible parties to prevent transport of asbestos from the site.

These constraints may result in restrictions of off-highway vehicle (OHV) and other uses and limitations on public access into the area. The public hearings held on the EPA proposals have resulted in significant concern expressed by recreation users about these potential restrictions. OHV representatives attending these hearings have suggested that BLM begin evaluating alternative sites in the vicinity for similar recreation use.

Although BLM is awaiting EPA's final ruling before proposing any plan amendments or other decisions, we are moving ahead on evaluating alternative OHV sites in the area, using funds made available by a State of California OHV Commission grant.

The results of BLM's studies will be included in the eventual Clear Creek Plan amendment. The identification of any new OHV use areas would depend on an assessment of land capability, evaluation of resource conflicts, and public input. All these evaluations include ample opportunity for public involvement and we would welcome any and all suggestions in addressing this legitimate problem.



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240



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Please Deliver the Following Information To:

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Name: Bernie Heyde

Organization: Hazardous Materials Staff (WO 707)

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Note: Please acknowledge receipt of this transmission by calling the above number. Also, if you do not receive all of the pages, please call us back at the above number as soon as possible to let us know.

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