

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**Bureau of Land Management**

[CA-680-99-2821-00-D889]

Closure and Restriction Orders**AGENCY:** Bureau of Land Management, (BLM) Interior.**ACTION:** Emergency closure of certain public lands to human entry in the Juniper Flats area, in San Bernardino County, California.

SUMMARY: Public lands in the Juniper Flats area are barred to human entry during Labor Day weekend, 1999. Closed are approximately 16,000 acres burned in the Willow fire. This 3-day emergency closure applies to all types of human access, including but not limited to: motor vehicles, equestrian, bike and foot traffic. This action prevents conflicts with ongoing fire suppression activities. The closure also protects visitors, soil, cultural resources, vegetation, wildlife, and wildlife habitat from further impact following damage from the fire.

DATES: This closure order goes into effect at 1 p.m. on Friday, September 3, 1999 and shall remain in effect until 12 midnight on Monday September 6, 1999.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tim Read, Barstow Field Office Manager, Bureau of Land Management, 2601 Barstow Road, Barstow, CA 92311; or call (760) 252-6000.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On Saturday August 28th, the Willow Fire started on U.S. Forest Service lands adjacent to BLM lands in the Juniper Flats area. The fire quickly spread and burned approximately 16,000 acres of BLM land. The fire is still burning and will not be contained before the start of the holiday weekend. Travel in the fire area is unsafe due to fire suppression activities, burned direction signs, rock slides and fallen trees.

As a result of the fire cultural resources, soils, vegetation, wildlife, and wildlife habitat are highly susceptible to further impacts resulting from human activity in the area. The fire burned away the vegetative cover and left bare soils exposed. The loss of vegetation has also stressed wildlife populations by reducing cover and forage. This emergency closure is required to prevent disturbances to sensitive resources in order to avoid excessive soil erosion and loss, vegetative damage, riparian area degradation, destruction of range management fences, and water quality impacts.

In general, all public lands are closed up to the Forest Boundary east of Deep Creek Road, South of the Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe Rail lines and west of Highway 18. The authority for this closure is 43 CFR 8364.1. This closure only applies to those portions of the following listed sections which were burned during the Willow Fire: San Bernardino Base and Meridian, T.3N. R.1W. Sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; T.3N. R.2W. sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8; T.3N. R.3W. sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12; T.4N. R.1W. sections 31 and 32; T.4N. R.2W. sections 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35; T.4N. R.3W. sections 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35. Any person who fails to comply with this closure order is subject to a fine of up to \$100,000 or imprisonment of up to 12 months, or both.

The following activities are exempt to this closure: law enforcement, emergency vehicles, agency personnel on official business, permitted uses, and the minimum access required to maintain utilities and infrastructure in the affected area. Private landowners and their guest accessing their land are also exempt. This closure affects only public lands. County roads and segments of roads through private lands are unaffected. The following route across public land is exempt from this closure: Brown Ranch Road, through public lands in section 31 of T.4N. R.2W., and sections 1, 11 and 12 of T.3N. R.3W.

This section will be reviewed in the context of the recommendations to be made by the fire rehabilitation team. If needed, the closure will be reissued for a longer time period, possibly a year.

Brad Blomquist,

BLM, Acting Barstow Field Office Manager.

[FR Doc. 99-24821 Filed 10-6-99; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**Bureau of Land Management**

[CA-680-99-2822-00-D889]

Closure and Restriction Orders**AGENCY:** Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Interior.**ACTION:** Emergency closure of certain public lands to human entry in the Juniper Flats area, San Bernardino County, California.

SUMMARY: Public lands in the Juniper Flats area are closed to human entry for 30 days, from September 18, 1999, to October 17, 1999. Closed are approximately 16,000 acres burned in

the Willow fire. You are not to enter the closed area by any means of access, including but not limited to: motor vehicles, OHVs, equestrian, bike or foot traffic. The closure protects soil, cultural resources, vegetation, wildlife, and wildlife habitat. It also allows ongoing fire assessment and repair activities to occur without interruption.

DATES: This closure order goes into effect at 12:01 a.m. on Saturday, September 18, 1999, and shall remain in effect until 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, October 17, 1999.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tim Read, Barstow Field Office Manager, Bureau of Land Management, 2601 Barstow Road, Barstow, CA 92311; or call (760) 252-6000.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On Saturday, August 28th, the Willow Fire started on U.S. Forest Service lands adjacent to BLM lands in the Juniper Flats area. The fire burned 63,486 acres, including approximately 16,000 acres of BLM land. Natural resources comprising the local ecosystems were extensively damaged by the fire. The vegetative cover was burned away leaving bare soils exposed and vulnerable to erosion. The loss of vegetation has also stressed wildlife populations by reducing available cover and forage.

As a result of the fire damage, cultural resources, soils, vegetation, wildlife, and wildlife habitat are extremely sensitive to further impacts from human activity. The closure is required to prevent disturbances to these sensitive resources. By preventing disturbances we will avoid excessive soil erosion and loss, vegetative damage, wildlife mortality, riparian area degradation, destruction of range management fences, and water quality impacts. Temporarily closing the area provides a protected environment for natural systems to begin recovering. A successful recovery is needed to sustain the long-term health of the land.

In general, all public lands are closed up to the forest boundary east of Deep Creek Road, south of the Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe rail lines and west of Highway 18. The authority for this closure is 43 CFR 8364.1. This closure only applies to those portions of the following sections burned during the Willow Fire: San Bernardino Base and Meridian, T.3N. R.1W. sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; T.3N. R.2W. sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8; T.3N. R.3W. sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12; T.4N. R.1W. sections 31 and 32; T.4N. R.2W. sections 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35; T.4N. R.3W. sections 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35. If you fail to comply with this

closure order you may be fined up to \$100,000.00 or be imprisoned for up to 12 months, or both.

You are exempt from this closure if you are engaged in one these activities: law enforcement, emergency services, agency personnel on official business, permitted uses, or work to maintain utilities and infrastructure. You and your guests are exempt if you own property or live within the closed area. This closure affects only public lands. County roads and segments of roads through private lands are unaffected. You are exempt to use the portion of Bowen Ranch Road that is a County road. The exempt portion crosses public lands in section 31 of T.4N. R.2W., and sections 1, 11 and 12 of T.3N. R.3W., ending at the boundary of the Bowen Ranch.

A previous 3-day emergency closure provided immediate protection for the burned area during Labor Day weekend. This 30-day closure is intended to provide interim protection while a long term rehabilitation strategy is developed. The strategy will be based on a report being prepared by a fire rehabilitation team. The team is currently assessing damage and planning corrective actions. This closure order may be re-issued for a longer time period based on the rehabilitation strategy.

Brad Blomquist,

BLM, Acting Barstow Field Office Manager.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[WY-060-1620-01; WYW141568, WYW146744]

Scoping Meeting on the Belle Ayr and North Jacobs Ranch Coal Lease Applications

AGENCY: Department of the Interior, Wyoming.

ACTION: Notice of Scoping Meeting on the Belle Ayr and North Jacobs Ranch coal lease applications in response to applications received from AMAX Land Co. (now RAG Wyoming Land Co.) and Jacobs Ranch Coal Co. for Federal coal in Campbell County, WY, in the decertified Powder River Federal Coal Production Region.

SUMMARY: BLM received an application from AMAX Land Co. (now RAG Wyoming Land Co.) on March 20, 1997 (WYW141568), for a tract of Federal coal that includes about 1,579 acres and approximately 200 million tons of in-

place coal in Campbell County, WY, adjacent to the existing Belle Ayr Mine. This tract is referred to as the Belle Ayr Tract. On October 2, 1998, BLM received an application from Jacobs Ranch Coal Company for a tract of Federal coal that includes about 4,821 acres and approximately 519 million tons of in-place coal in Campbell County, WY, adjacent to the existing Jacobs Ranch Mine. This tract is referred to as the North Jacobs Ranch Tract. Both tracts were applied for as maintenance lease-by-applications (LBAs), under the provisions of 43 CFR 3425.1.

The Powder River Regional Coal Team (RCT) reviewed the Belle Ayr coal lease application at their meeting on April 23, 1997, in Casper, WY, and recommended that the BLM process it. The RCT reviewed the North Jacobs Ranch coal lease application at their meeting on February 23, 1999, in Billings, MT, and recommended that BLM process it and that BLM and the State of Wyoming work with the oil and gas and coal operators to resolve conflicts with existing and proposed oil and gas development in the area of the tract.

As part of the LBA process, BLM will complete an environmental analysis, develop possible stipulations regarding mining operations, determine the fair market value (FMV) of the tract, and evaluate maximum economic recovery (MER), of the coal in the proposed tract.

BLM is considering preparing a separate environmental impact statement (EIS) for each application to satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). An EIS is being considered for the Belle Ayr tract because of the proximity of the tract to existing coalbed methane development and because of the potential for cumulative environmental impacts. An EIS is also being considered for the North Jacobs Ranch tract. Seven new Federal coal leases have been issued to the five mines south and east of Wright, WY, (including the Jacobs Ranch Mine) since decertification of the Powder River Federal Coal Region. Proposed coalbed methane development, existing oil and gas development on the tract, and the potential for cumulative impacts are other major reasons for considering an EIS.

DATES: As part of the public scoping process, a public scoping meeting is scheduled at 7 p.m., on October 19, 1999, at the Tower West Lodge, 109 North US Highway 14-16, Gillette, WY. If you have concerns or issues that you believe the BLM should address in processing these lease applications, you

can express them verbally at the scoping meeting; or you can mail, e-mail, or fax written comments to BLM at the address given below by October 30, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Please address written questions, comments or concerns to Casper Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, Attn: Nancy Doelger, 1701 East E Street, Casper, WY 82601.

Address e-mail to

Nancy__Doelger@blm.gov, or fax comments to 307-234-1525, Attn: Nancy Doelger.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Nancy Doelger or Mike Karbs at the above address, or phone: 307-261-7600.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On March 20, 1997, AMAX Land Company (now RAG Wyoming Land Co.) filed a coal lease application with the BLM for a maintenance tract LBA for the following lands:

T. 48 N., R. 71 W., 6th PM, Wyoming
Section 18: Lots 17 thru 19;
Section 19: Lots 5 thru 19;
Section 20: Lots 3(SW4), 4(W2,SE4), 5, 6, 7(S2), 9(S2), 10 thru 16;
Section 21: Lots 13,14;
Section 28: Lots 3, 6;
Section 29: Lots 1, 6;

T. 48 N., R. 72 W., 6th PM, Wyoming
Section 24: Lots 1,8

The tract includes 1,578.741 acres more or less, with an estimated 200 million tons of coal in place.

The Belle Ayr Mine is adjacent to the lease application area. The Belle Ayr Mine has an approved mining and reclamation plan, and an approved air quality permit from the Air Quality Division of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to mine up to 25 million tons of coal per year. According to the application filed for the Belle Ayr Tract, it is a maintenance tract that would be mined to extend the life of the existing mine.

On October 2, 1998, Jacobs Ranch Coal Company filed a coal lease application with the BLM for a maintenance tract LBA for the following lands:

T. 44 N., R. 70 W., 6th PM, Wyoming
Section 26: Lots 9, 10;
Section 27: Lots 1 thru 16;
Section 28: Lots 1 thru 16;
Section 29: Lots 1 thru 16;
Section 30: Lots 5 thru 20;
Section 31: Lots 5 thru 20;
Section 32: Lots 5 thru 20;
Section 33: Lots 4, 5, 12, 13;

T. 44 N., R. 71 W., 6th PM, Wyoming
Section 25: Lots 1 thru 16

The tract includes 4,821 acres more or less with an estimated 519 million tons of coal in place.

The Jacobs Ranch Mine is adjacent to the lease application area. The Jacobs