

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Custer NF

2602 1st. Avenue North
P.O. Box 2556
Billings, MT 59103

REPLY TO: 1920/7720

DATE: July 27, 1993

SUBJECT: Request for Forest Plan Exception to Management Area C
100 feet buffer of prairie dog town: Meridian Oil, Inc. 34-33
oil and gas well.

TO: District Ranger, McKenzie RD

I have reviewed the analysis conducted by your staff and concur with the need of, and rationale for a site-specific exception to Forest Plan Management Area C Standard 5.b(3), which limits activity and/or facility development within 100 feet of prairie dog towns. I approve this exception for the Meridian Oil Inc. (MOI) 34-33 oil well and access road. This approval and your supporting rationale is to be included in the documentation of this project.

/s/ Sherry Milburn (for)

STEPHEN J. SOLEM
Acting Forest Supervisor

cc: SO Planning

REPLY TO: 1920/1950

DATE: July 22, 1993

SUBJECT: Request for Forest Plan Exception in regard to to Management Area C,
and 100 feet buffer of prairie dog town: Meridian Oil, Inc., 34-33
oil and gas well

TO: SO Planning Branch/Forest Supervisor

The McKenzie Ranger District requests a project specific exception to the Forest Plan Management Area C (5.b.3), limiting activity and/or facility development within 100 feet of prairie dog towns. This exception would be for the Meridian Oil Inc. (MOI) 34-33 oil well access road in the NE 1/4 Section 4, T146N R100W (see accompanying map).

Current Situation

An access road is needed to drill an outstanding oil well in Section 34 of T147N R100W. The access road would bisect a corner at an existing prairie dog town.

Proposed Activity

The preferred alternative for the MOI 34-33 is Alternative 1, the proposed action. Under this alternative, a Special Use Permit would be issued to construct 574 feet of access road from the existing road #823-1 in Section 4 to Section 33 and the proposed well pad. Total disturbance of all new road and well pad is estimated at 4.1 acres.

Recommendation - Rationale for Exception

I recommend that a site specific exception to the Forest Plan for limiting activity and/or facility development within 100 feet of prairie dog towns be granted. Other alternatives were considered, but Alternative 1 was reasonable, and other alternatives showed no apparent advantages. Existing road #823-1 to a producing oil and gas well bisects the 4 acre prairie dog town. The proposed access would bisect a corner of the existing prairie dog town. This road is the shortest route to the proposed well site and causes the least surface disturbance. Alternative 4 would buffer the prairie dog town, but would be located entirely in the J Management area as opposed to C Management area, but would be a longer road with more surface disturbance. Alternative 3 would be located entirely on B Management area, but would require almost twice the surface disturbance and create a new creek crossing of Bennett-Cottonwood Creek.

The Bennett-Cottonwood Management Area C was created for Bighorn sheep management. The prairie dog town affected by the road access occupies about 4 acres. Four other towns are located within a four mile radius. The other towns and the affected town total less than 50 acres. Internal consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service has been made and no problem is foreseen with the proposed road access. Alternative 3 effects the most bighorn sheep habitat areas, and the proposed Alternative 1 and Alternative 4 effects on bighorn sheep habitat is similar. The proposed exception would best meet the management area goals and would not interfere with the goal of Bighorn Sheep Management Area C.

/s/ Lesley W. Thompson
LESLEY W. THOMPSON
District Ranger

July 22, 1993
DATE