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BLM presents residents with potash mine's impact

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NEWS-SUN

For the second day in a row Bureau of Land Management employees didn't get any comments on the planned Intercontinental Potash Corp. potash mine west of Jal.

The BLM presented the draft environmental impact statement to a full house of more than 30 Jal residents Wednesday at the Woolworth Community Library. The first public



IC POTASH CORP

hearing was held Tuesday in Carlsbad.

The mine is planned to be some 27 miles west of Jal and have a load-out train depot just three miles north of the town. Jal residents sat quietly as

BLM staff described the mine and the environmental impacts, but no questions or comments were raised.

Steve Graber, consultant with AECOM, which is helping the BLM with the EIS, said the reception was similar at the Carlsbad meeting.

"We didn't get any comment forms returned yesterday," Graber said Wednesday, "but sometimes they will send them in later."

Public input on the EIS is due by Sept. 23, but it appears Jal residents are anxious to see the project, which will employ 1,500 construction workers and 500 full-time jobs, break ground.

Jal Mayor Cheryl Chance said she has read through most of the EIS document and has no concerns about the project, but is hopeful it will happen.

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"I think it will be a tremendous boost for Jal," she said. "We just have to get some housing."

Jal resident and state Rep. Carroll Leavell, R-Jal, said he was concerned about aspects of the project, but feels the company has addressed those issues with the BLM's support.

"I think they have addressed all my concerns," he said. "My first concern was water. Using the Capitan Reef water is the perfect solution for this. That was my greatest concern."

Leavell added he feels the project will be a boon to Jal and the county.

"It is going to be a real help to the south part of the county," he said. "I think the greatest thing we are going to see is it will flatten out the highs and lows in our economy we have seen with oil and gas."

Ellen Dietrich with AECOM, presented the draft EIS to Jal residents Wednesday. ICP submitted their mine plan in October 2011 for a site some 27 miles west of Jal that will be on a mix of state, BLM and private lands.

Dietrich said the underground mine will be 59 percent under state land, 18 percent under BLM land and 23 percent under private land. The above ground operations will also be on a mix of state, BLM and private lands.

The load-out train depot will be 79 percent on private land and a road will be constructed a few miles west of Jal that



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BLM staffer John Chopp explains the potash mine's potential impact on the prairie chicken to Jal resident Gerald Anderson.

will allow ICP trucks to avoid driving through the community to reach the depot.

The mine will need 4,000 gallons of water per minute for its 50-year life span. That water will come from the deep, Capitan Reef aquifer, which is a salt water aquifer. Dietrich said the aquifer will drop 650 feet by the end of the mine's life and will have less than a 0.06 percent impact on the Pecos River. The aquifer's waters flow both east and west and the west flow runs beneath the Pecos River.

The biggest above-ground impact will be the mine's tailing, which were predicted to be 200 feet high. Dietrich said the BLM is working with ICP to either sell off portions of the tails — a possible revenue stream still being developed — or have portions of the tails

returned to the ground to reduce the above ground tailings by 30 percent.

The 1,500-foot deep mine will, after 50 years of mining cause a ground subsidence, or downward settling, of about four feet, Dietrich said.

"You won't see a four-foot drop at the surface, but over the entire depth," she said.

ICP proposes to mine polyhalite deposits from a depth of 1,500 feet below the surface and extract sulphate of potash and extract sulphate of potash from those deposits. Sulphate of potash, also known as potassium sulphate, is used in fertilizer. The company is eyeing a second quarter 2014 ground-breaking.

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