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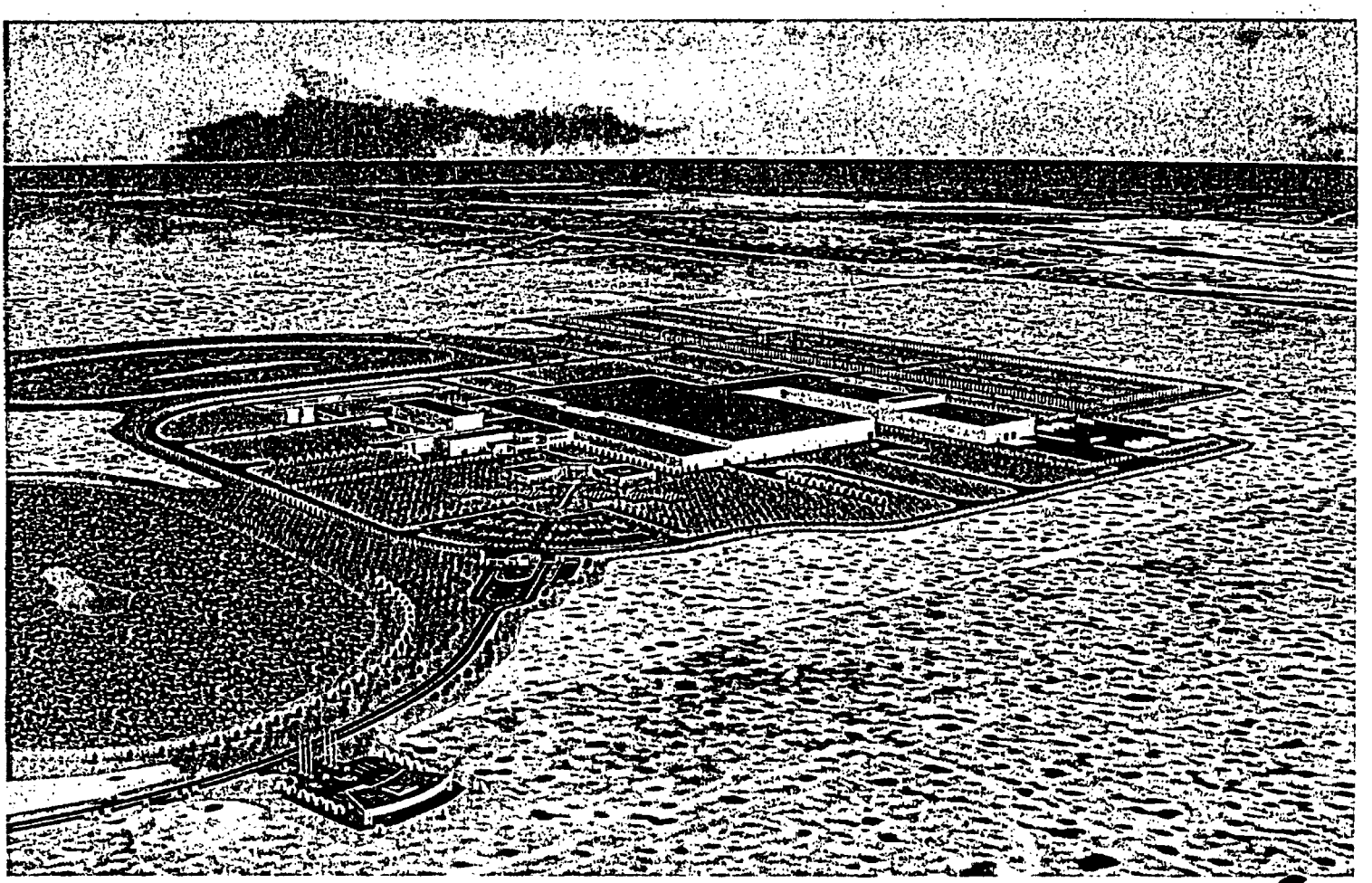
NATIONAL ENRICHMENT FACILITY

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT



predominantly of an alluvial or eolian origin. The texture of the surface soils is generally silt to silty sands. Therefore, the surface soils are relatively low in permeability, and would tend to hold moisture in storage rather than allow rapid infiltration to depth. Water held in storage in the soil is subsequently subject to evapotranspiration. Nine subsurface borings were drilled at the site during September 2003. Only one of the borings produced cuttings that were slightly moist at 1.8 to 4.2 m (6 to 14 ft) below ground surface; other cuttings were very dry. Evapotranspiration processes are significant enough to short-circuit any potential groundwater recharge.

There is some evidence for shallow (near-surface groundwater occurrence in areas to the north and east of the site. These conditions are intermittent and limited. A quarry operated by Wallach Concrete, Inc. is located just north of the NEF site. Wallach has extensively mined sand and gravel from the quarry. The typical geologic cross section at that site consists of a layer of caliche at the surface, referred to as the "caprock," underlain by a sand and gravel deposit, which in turn overlies a thick clay unit of the Dockum Group, referred to as red beds, and part of the Chinle Formation. Table 3.3-1, Geological Units Exposed At, Near, or Underlying the Site and Figure 3.3-5, Site Boring Plan and Profile depict this stratigraphy. Figure 3.4-3, View of a Pit Wall in a Wallach Sand & Gravel Excavation to the North of the NEF Site, shows a pit wall in one of Wallach's excavations, where the caprock (caliche) overlies sand and gravel, with the red bed clay Chinle Formation at the base of the pit. In some areas the caprock is missing and the sand and gravel is exposed at the surface. The caprock is generally fractured and, following precipitation events may allow infiltration that quickly bypasses any roots from surface vegetation. In addition, the areas where the sand and gravel outcrop may allow rapid infiltration of precipitation. These conditions have led to instances of minor amounts of perched groundwater at the base of the sand and gravel unit, atop the red bed Chinle Formation. The Chinle red bed clay has a very low permeability, about 1×10^{-8} cm/s (4×10^{-9} in/s) (Rainwater, 1996), and serves as a confining unit arresting downward percolation of localized recharge.

Figure 3.4-4, Groundwater Seep at the Base of a Wallach Sand & Gravel Excavation to the North of the NEF Site, shows a shallow surface depression filled with water in the base of one of Wallach's gravel pits. The water is present perennially due to a seep at the base of the sand and gravel unit at the top of the Chinle clay. Occasionally the water is pumped out of this depression for use on site. The rate of replenishment has not been quantified, but it is relatively slow. The amount of water in the pit is insufficient to fully supply the quarry operations. This shallow perched zone is not likely to be pervasive throughout the area; not all of Wallach's excavations encounter this horizon. It is not considered to be an aquifer.

Conditions at the NEF site are different than at the Wallach site. Two conditions are of particular importance. First, the caprock is not present at the NEF site. Therefore, rapid infiltration through fractured caliche does not contribute to localized recharge at the NEF site. Second, the surface soils at the NEF site are finer-grained than the sand and gravel at the Wallach site. There is a thin layer of sand and gravel just above the red bed Chinle clay unit on the NEF site, but based on recent investigations, it is not saturated. Further, that horizon at the NEF site is very dry or at a residual saturation level based on information from the nine recent soil borings.

Another instance of saturation above the Chinle clay may be seen at Baker Spring, just to the northeast of the NEF site. Baker Spring is located at the edge of an escarpment, where the caprock ends. The location of Baker Spring is shown on Figure 3.4-1, Local Hydrologic

these localized perched zones is likely to be "buffalo wallows," (playas) depressions located near the windmills. The buffalo wallows are substantial surface depressions that collect surface water runoff. Water collecting in these depressions is inferred to infiltrate below the root zone due to the ponding conditions. WCS has drilled monitoring wells in these areas to characterize the nature and extent of the saturated conditions. Some of these wells are dry, owing to the localized nature of the perched conditions. When water is encountered in the sand and gravel above the Chinle Formation red beds its level is slow to recover following sampling events, due to the low permeability of the perched saturated zones. The discontinuity of this saturated zone and its low permeability argue against its definition an aquifer. No buffalo wallows or related groundwater conditions occur on or near the NEF site.

The NEF is located in an area with little to no surface water or runoff. Monument Draw is an intermittent stream and the closest surface water conveyance feature. Flow data are presented in ER Section 3.4.12.9, Design-Basis Flood Elevation.

Walvoord et al,. 2002 (Walvoord, 2002) best describes the hydrologic conditions that occur in the shallow surface regime at the NEF site. This reference uses field investigations including geochemical and soil-physics based techniques, as well as computer modeling, to show that there is no recharge occurring in thick, desert vadose zones with desert vegetation. Precipitation that infiltrates into the subsurface is efficiently transpired by the native vegetation. Vapor-phase movement of soil-moisture may occur, but it is also intercepted by the vegetation. In a thick vadose zone, such as at the NEF site, the deeper part of that zone has a natural thermal gradient that induces upward vapor diffusion. As a result, a small flux of water vapor rises from depth to the base of the root zone, and any infiltration coming from the land surface is captured by the roots of the plants within the top several meters (feet) of the profile. Effectively there is a maximum negative pressure potential at the base of the root zone that acts like a sink, where water is taken up by the plants and transpired. These deep desert soil systems have functioned in this manner for thousands of years, essentially since the time of the last glacial period when precipitation rates fell dramatically. It is expected that these conditions will remain for several thousand more years (until the next glacial period), unless the hydrology and vegetation is altered dramatically.

3.4.1.1.1 Site Groundwater Investigations

A subsurface investigation was initiated at the NEF site in September 2003 to delineate specific hydrologic conditions. Figure 3.3-5, Site Boring Plan and Profile and Figure 3.4-6, Dockum Group (Chinle Formation) Surface Contour, show the locations of subsurface borings and monitoring wells.

The WCS facility is located directly to the east of the NEF site in Texas. It has had numerous subsurface investigations performed for the purpose of delineating and monitoring site subsurface hydrogeologic conditions. Much of this information is directly pertinent to the NEF site. The WCS hydrogeologic data was used in planning the recent NEF site investigations. A recent evaluation of potential groundwater impacts in the area provides a good overview of the investigations performed for the WCS facility (Rainwater, 1996).

The NEF site investigation initiated in September 2003 had two main objectives: 1) delineate the depth to the top of the Chinle Formation red beds to assess the potential for saturated conditions above the red beds, and 2) complete three monitoring wells in the siltstone layer beneath the red beds to monitor water level and water quality within this thin horizon of perched intermittent saturation.

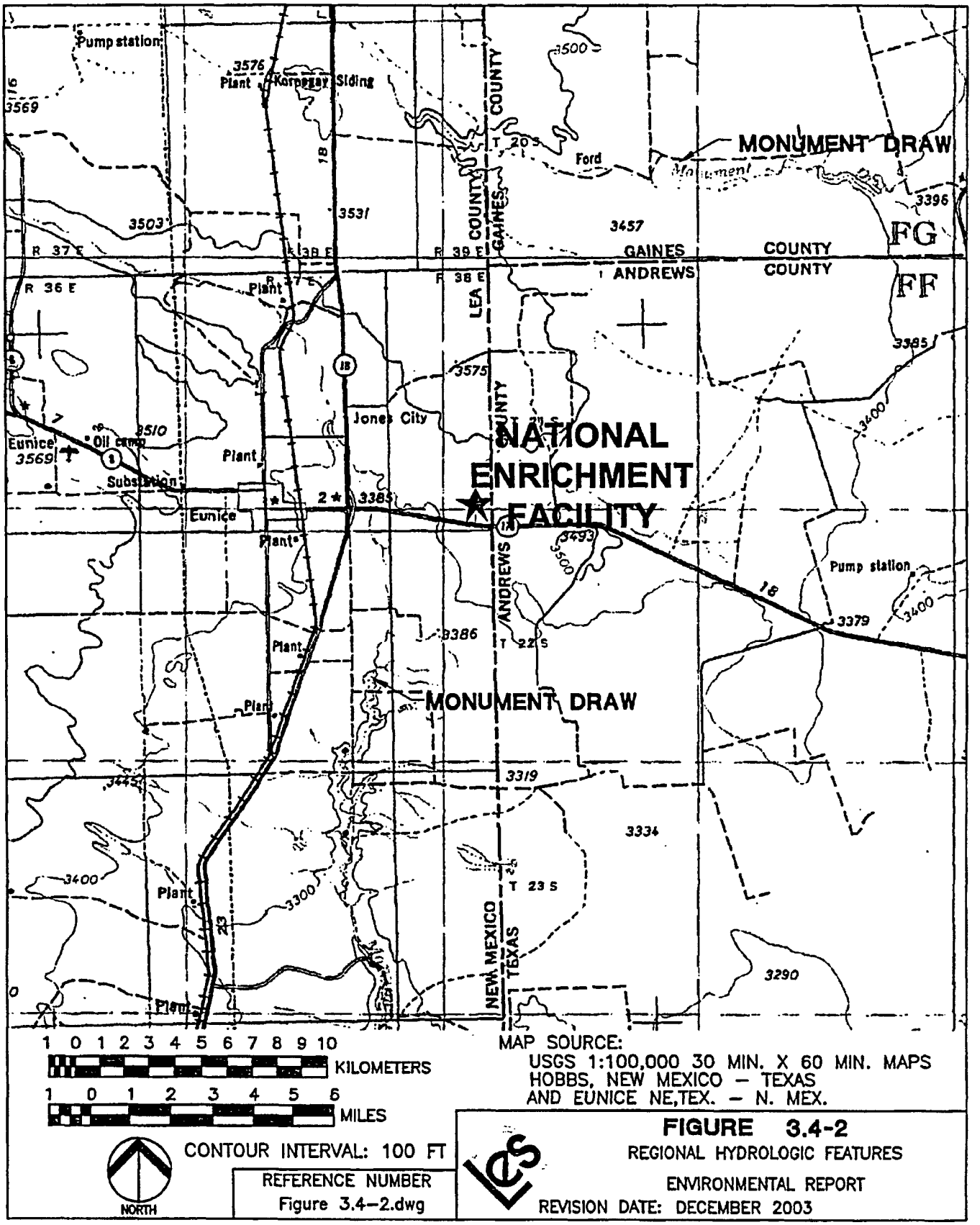


FIGURE 3.4-2

REGIONAL HYDROLOGIC FEATURES

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FIGURE 3.4-4

GROUNDWATER SEEP AT THE BASE OF A WALLACH SAND & GRAVEL EXCAVATION TO THE NORTH OF THE NEF SITE
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FIGURE 3.4-5

VIEW OF BAKER SPRING AREA
TO THE NORTHEAST OF THE NEF SITE
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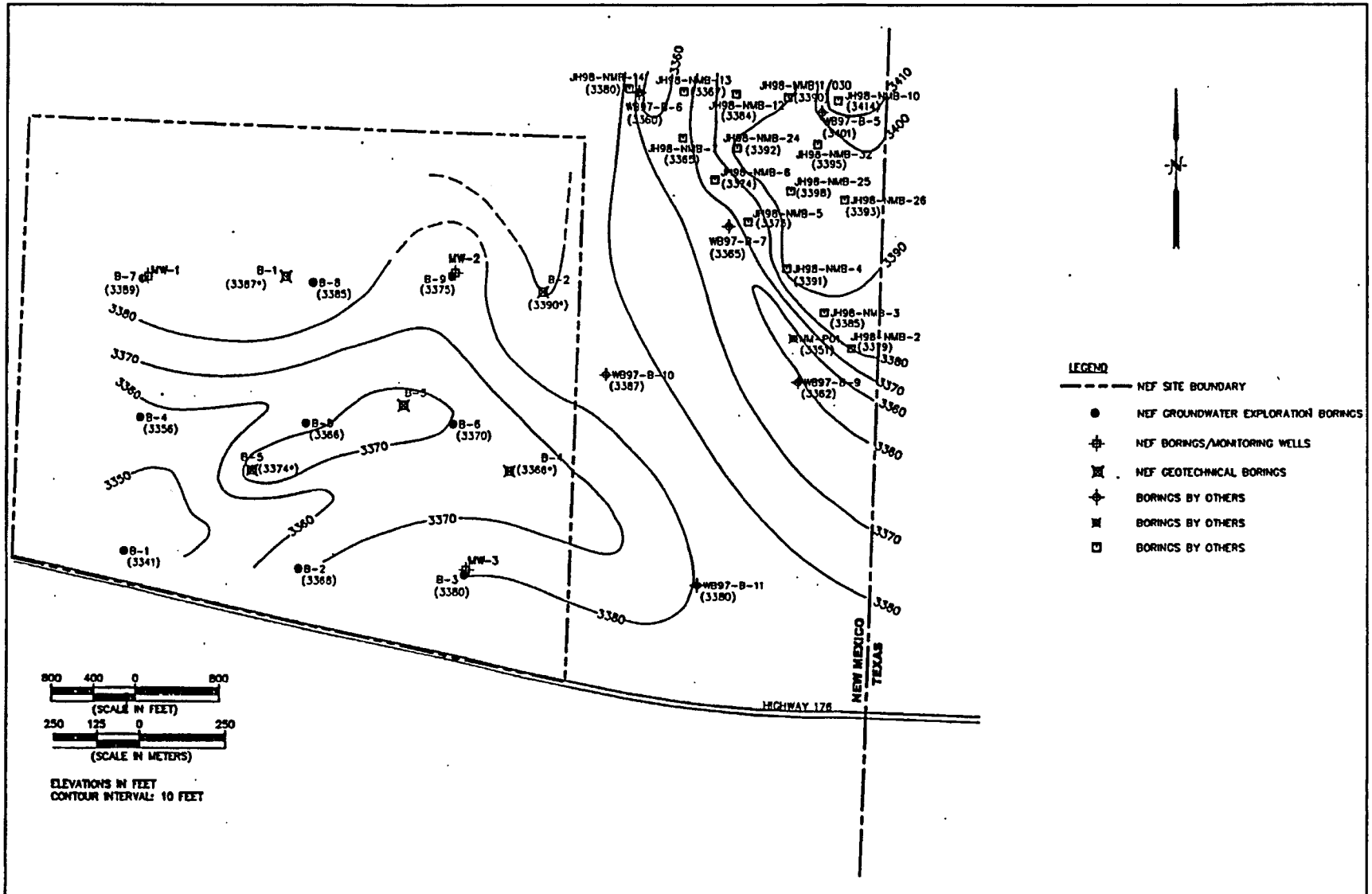

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FIGURE 3.4-6
DOCKUM GROUP (CHINLE FORMATION)
SURFACE CONTOUR
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