EXON COAL and MINERALS COMPANY

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laš amprovo SAFETY, HEALTH **& ENVIRONMENT LINDA Z. KRUPNIK** Manager

RECCLEO

December 18, 1998

Docket No. $40 - 8102$ License No. SUA-1'139

U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Division of Waste Management, M.S. 5 E2 ATTN: Joseph J. Holonich, Chief High Level Waste and Uranium Recovery Projects Branch Mail Stop T7J9 11545 Rockville Pike Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Sir:

Exxon Corporation, c/o Exxon Coal and Minerals Company, possesses the Highland uranium' tailings basin in Converse County, Wyoming under License No. SUA-1 139. This submittal **:.** requests a license amendment changing the Highland tailings basin Ground Water Protection. Limits (GPLs) for nickel (Ni), radium-226+228 (Ra-226+228) and natural uranium (UNAT) to the Alternate Concentration Limits (ACLs) found below.

In 1989 NRC approved the tailings basin reclamation plan and ECMC completed most of the reclamation. However, a small area of the basin has been only partially reclaimed due: to, operation of an evaporation pond associated with the ground water Corrective Action. Program (CAP) and continued tailings consolidation. Continuation of the ground water recovery operation prevents completion of the final reclamation of the tailings basin.

ECMC submitted the CAP to the NRC Uranium Recovery Field Office on August 15, 1989, in response to a July 3, 1989, letter from the NRC. The CAP consisted of.pumping five wells to remove Potentially Hazardous Constituents (PHCs) from the uppermost aquifer. The evaporation pond receives this well production.

NRC approved the CAP on August 18, 1989, with License Amendment 32 to License SUA-. 1139. ECMC began recovering ground water in accordance with the CAP in November of 1989. In 1990 NRC approved discontinuing pumping from one of the five wells due to very limited production. The system has recovered 16.6 million gallons through October 1998, and the aquifer has fallen substantially. Two of the four remaining recovery wells are now incapable of producing a significant volume of water due to the low ground water levels.

With License Amendment No. 44 issued November 16, 1994, the November 16, 1994, the NRC approvad suspension of
With License Amendment November 16, 1994, the NRC approvad suspension of the NRC approvad suspension of the NR CAP operations from December 15 through April 15 to avoid winter operations. The system now produces too little water to prevent pipeline freezing. In approving the annual shutdown,

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NRC concluded turning off the wells during the winter would not pose a threat to the environment or to the health and welfare of the public.

Most of the PHCs have fallen to concentrations below the GPLs in the license. Ni and Ra 226+228 at one Point of Compliance **(POC)** well and UNAT at two **POC** wells still exceed the GPLs. However, the existing concentrations are not a hazard to the environment or the public. The Ni, Ra 226+228 and UNAT concentrations are not improving and are not expected to improve with continued operation of the CAP. Therefore, ECMC requests approval of the ACLs in the table found below. The monitoring data from the past four years including 1998 meet these ACLs.

ECMC has determined appropriate Health and Environmental Limits (HELs) at the Potential Points of Exposure (POEs) and extrapolated these to the POC wells through site specific attenuation factors. Derived Health and Environmental Limits (DHELs) were calculated for the POCs using the HELs and the attenuation factors. The proposed ACLs are at or below the DHEL concentrations as indicated in the table.

The CAP was approved by the NRC as being the method by which the PHC concentrations could be reduced to As Low As Reasonably Achievable (ALARA). With no improvement in the Ni, Ra 226+228 and UNAT concentrations occurring at the POCs, the ALARA concentrations have been demonstrated since there are no further reasonable corrections actions available.

Setting an ACL requires determining an ALARA concentration for each PHC for which an ACL is sought. In this ACL application, the ALARA concentrations reported are based on the mean concentrations at the POCs plus 1.96 times the standard deviation of the data for each PHC. The proposed ACLs equal the ALARA concentrations.

NA means not applicable. There is no POE associated with Well 125.

The proposed ACLs do not pose a substantial present or potential hazard to human health or the environment. With NRC approval of the ACLs, the ground water monitoring results will meet the NRC limits. ECMC proposes decommissioning the CAP upon approval of the ACLs. The remaining tailings basin reclamation could be completed when the CAP evaporation pond is dry and tailings consolidation meets the license requirement. The wells would be reclaimed after a successful two-year post-corrective action-monitoring period.

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The attached report, "Supporting Information for Alternate Concentration Limit Application", provides detailed information on the Highland tailings basin, ground water levels and quality, the CAP and the ACLs.

The NRC provided comments on a 1995 ACL application. The NRC comments and the ECMC responses that are all incorporated into the supporting document are summarized below:

" Provide human health and wildlife hazard assessments for exposure to surface water from Highland Reservoir, the creek that runs through the tailings basin and the North Fork of Box Creek.

These are primarily addressed in Section 2.3.2.3 (Possible Points of Exposure) of the Hazard Assessment. The measured concentrations of Ra 226+228, selenium and UNAT in Highland Reservoir are not the results of tailings basin seepage. The reservoir is regulated under the Highland Mining Permit from the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality.

There is no hydrologic connection between the tailings basin seepage and the other surface water areas. No creek runs through the tailings basin. The unnamed tributary to the North Fork of Box Creek that once existed west of the tailings basin dam is filled with mine overburden, tailings and the tailings basin conpacted earthen dam. The unnamed tributary still exists east of the tailings basin dam, but ground water from the uppermost aquifer does not reach it now, nor will it reach it in the future. The same is true for the North Fork of Box Creek.

Provide and Justify Point of Exposure Locations

These are primarily addressed in Section 2.3.2.3 (Possible Points of Exposure) of the Hazard Assessment.

Provide Point of Compliance Justifications

ECMC did not propose the POCs locations. On December 29, 1988, the NRC selected four wells to be POCs (Amendment No. 27) from all the wells for which data were presented by ECMC. These four POC wells lie to the north, south, east and west of the center of the ponded water once held within the tailings basin, This pond created the seepage mound below the basin that has now largely dissipated. The four wells are within the area ECMC has proposed to be deeded to the state or federal government for perpetual monitoring.

" Provide Basis for Projected Attenuation Rates in Ground Water

This subject is primarily discussed in Section 2.3.6.1 (Basis for Attenuation Factors) of the Hazard Assessment. By the early 1990s the advance of the PHCs had essentially ceased as predicted in a 1982 study by Exxon Production Research Company. Therefore, simple ratios created by dividing the concentrations of the PHCs at the POEs by the concentrations at the corresponding POCs provide suitable attenuation factors.

Designate Site Area for Perpetual Monitoring

This is found on Figure 1.2. The site area is labeled "Proposed Perpetual Monitoring Area."

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Revisit Proposed Well 125 ACL Value Since Proposal Is Lower Than ALARA Value

The proposed **ACL** value now equals the ALARA value (see Table E-1 in the Executive Summary).

Revisit Location of Chloride Seepage Front

This subject is introduced on page 1-17 in Section 1.3.2 (Hydrologic Setting) of the General Information. The subject is dealt with in detail in Section 3 of Appendix 3 (Highland Tailings Basin Ground Water Study).

The NRC letter of March 13, 1997, asked ECMC to include-a new corrective action assessment in the **ACL** application. This review is provided in Appendix 7 of the Supporting Information.

If you have any questions regarding this application, please contact David Range of my staff at (713) 978-5438.

Yours truly,
Sanda J. Kanpiel

LZK:DMR\dmr

Enclosure (5 copies)

cc: D. M. Range w/o Enclosure

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Executive Summary

Exxon Corporation, c/o Exxon Coal and Minerals Company (ECMC), possesses the Highland uranium tailings basin in Converse County, Wyoming under License No. SUA-1139. The tailings basin was originally licensed under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Atomic Energy Commission prepared the Final Environmental Statement (FES). The FES acknowledged that seepage would occur from the tailings basin with some decline in ground water quality occurring around the basin. The license was issued with no requirement for ground water mitigation.

The Highland tailings basin was constructed in 1972 by building a dam across a natural valley underlain by interbedded sandstones, siltstones, mudstones and shales. The natural valley is usually referred to as the unnamed tributary to the North Fork of Box Creek. The uppermost aquifer is referred to as the Tailings Dam Sandstone (TDSS). It has not been developed locally as a ground water source. Prior to mining it was a recharge source to the ephemeral North Fork of Box Creek south of Highland. Early in the operations seepage from the tailings basin surfaced in the unnamed tributary downstream of the dam, but the seepage stopped within three years of the permanent 1984 shutdown of the Highland mill.

The Tailings Dam Shale (TDSh) that has been described as the most laterally continuous formation in the Highland vicinity underlies the TDSS. This formation prevents significant impacts to aquifers further down in the geologic profile, confining Potentially Hazardous Constituents (PHCs) to the TDSS. A detailed 1982 study by Exxon Production Research Company (EPR) thoroughly evaluated the hydrologic and geochemical properties of the TDSS and the TDSh.

The current TDSS piezometric surface indicates tailings seepage does not reach surface water such as the North Fork of Box Creek nor its unnamed tributary. Currently, seepage only has potential to affect ground water and Highland Reservoir since the seepage movement is now towards the west. Ground and surface water inflows formed this reservoir within two connecting ECMC open pit uranium mines. The tailings seepage through the TDSS is only a minor source of ground water to Highland Reservoir. This component will decline over time; entirely ceasing by the time the reservoir is full.

ECMC had a steady state ground water model based on Visual MODFLOW© prepared for when the reservoir is full and ground water levels have stabilized. Based on this model, the seepage in the TDSS will be towards the east after the reservoir is full, but will not reach surface water such as the creek and its unnamed tributary. The supporting data for these conclusions are included in the introduction and in Appendix 3

In License Amendment No. 27 the NRC selected four Point of Compliance (POC) wells around the tailings basin completed in the TDSS. The conformity of Potentially Hazardous Constituents (PHCs) against Ground Water Protection Limits (GPLs) mandated by NRC regulations is determined at the four POC wells. The NRC selected **POC** wells that are north, south, east and west of the tailings basin since seepage had, over the lifetime of the operation and most of the time since then, moved in all

directions. As discussed above, the principle direction is now west. The GPLs were set by the NRC based on the Table **5C** values in Appendix A to 10 CFR Part 40 and background.

Under the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act, ECMC has operated a ground water Corrective Action Program (CAP) at the tailings basin since 1989 that was approved by the NRC as being capable of achieving As Low As Reasonably Achievable (ALARA) concentrations. In 1994 the NRC approved suspension of CAP operations from December 15 through April 15 to avoid trying to operate the system during the winter since the system now produces too little water to prevent the CAP pipeline from freezing.

In approving the winter shutdown (License Amendment No. 44), NRC concluded that turning off the wells during the winter would not pose a threat to the environment or **to** the health and welfare of the public.

NRC proposed the basic concept for the current CAP after an exhaustive examination of possible remedies was completed for **ECMC** and reviewed by NRC. The detailed CAP was submitted by **ECMC** and approved by the NRC as being the method by which the PHC concentrations could be reduced to As Low As Reasonably Achievable (ALARA).

Most of the PHCs in the ground water now meet the GPLs at the **POC** wells. However, nickel (Ni) at one **POC** well, radium 226 plus 228 (Ra 226 + 228) at the same **POC** well and natural uranium (UNAT) at two other **POC** wells still exceed the GPLs. One of the two wells with elevated UNAT is now dry and will remain dry for many decades until Highland Reservoir is nearly full. The other well with elevated UNAT will eventually be dry and remain so permanently. The Ni, Ra 226 + 228, and UNAT concentrations are not generally improving and are not expected to improve with continued operation of the CAP. Therefore, **ECMC** is proposing the Alternate Concentration Limits (ACLs) in Table E-1 found on the next page.

ECMC has determined appropriate Health and Environmental Limits (HELs) at appropriate Potential Points of Exposure (POEs) in developing the ACLs. The HELs are existing or proposed EPA Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) for public drinking water supplies. The POEs are proposed and justified in this document. ECMC completed a comprehensive risk assessment for the HELs proposed that is included in Appendix 6 although EPA has already asserted these concentrations are appropriate limits for public use. ECMC extrapolated these HELs to the POCs from the POEs through site specific attenuation factors. This extrapolation resulted in the calculation of the Derived Health and Environmental Limits (DHELs) provided in Table E-1 using the HELs and the attenuation factors. The proposed ACLs are at or below the DHEL concentrations. There is one exception. There is no possible point of exposure east of **POC** Well 125 since the aquifer is dry in this direction and there is no surface discharge of the ground water. Therefore, an exposure-based limit such as an HEL or DHEL is not appropriate for this location and only an ALARA value applies.

As stated above, a substantial improvement in water quality has occurred since the CAP was implemented with most PHCs now meeting the GPLs. ECMC has completed of the ground water. Therefore, an exposure-based limit such as an HEL or DHEL is not appropriate for this location and only an ALARA value applies.

As stated above, a substantial improvement in water quality has occurred since the CAP was implemented with most PHCs now meeting the GPLs. ECMC has completed a new evaluation of corrective action plan alternatives that could further mitigate the PHCs that still exceed the GPLs. This evaluation is included in Appendix 7. The evaluation demonstrates that the costs of additional mitigation greatly outweigh the benefits. With no further improvement occurring in the past several years at the POC wells where the GPLs are still exceeded and the new evaluation of mitigation alternatives, the ALARA concentrations have been demonstrated.

The ALARA concentrations in Table E-1 are based on the mean concentration for each PHC plus two standard deviations. For insitu uranium mining the compliance intervals for monitor wells around the production wells are based on the mean plus five standard deviations, so the proposal here is stricter. The proposed ACLs equal the lower value in each case of comparing the DHELs and the ALARA concentrations. In all cases the ALARA concentration equaled or was below the DHEL.

The POC well monitoring data from the past four years meet the proposed ACLs.

Table E-1 PROPOSED ALTERNATE CONCENTRATION LIMITS

NA means not applicable. There is no POE associated with Well 125.

There is no POE relative to **POC** Well 125. The proposed ACL is the ALARA value. The monitoring data suggest the UNAT and the non-potentially hazardous constituents at this well are declining. There is no present or anticipated future potential health or environmental risk associated with this well nor with any ground water east of the tailings basin.

The Ra 226+228 ACL at Well 175 is less than the Maximum Concentration Limits (MCLs) that have been proposed by the EPA for public drinking water supplies. The ECMC proposes that the **POC** Well 125 UNAT **ACL** apply east of the tailings basin, the **POC** Well 175 ACLs for Ni and Ra 226+228 apply in all directions from the tailings basin and the POC Well 177 UNAT **ACL** apply in all directions but east of the tailings basin.

With approval of the ACLs the ground water quality at the **POC** wells will meet the NRC license limits. Because there has been no significant change in water quality in several years, ECMC proposes that concurrent with approval of the ACLs that permission be given to: 1) Terminate the ground water corrective action, 2) Decommission the corrective action system, 3) Complete reclamation of the tailings basin when the tailings settlement has reached the ground settlement milestone specified in the license and 4) Terminate ground water monitoring and decommission the monitor wells after a two year monitoring period following termination of the corrective action, assuming the monitoring results continue to meet the new GPLs incorporating the ACLs proposed.

The ground water data at the POCs will be considered to meet the ACLs as long as the ACLs are not exceeded. In the event an **ACL** is exceeded, ECMC will conduct an investigation to-determine if the ground water has indeed failed to meet the ACLs. Since the ALARA values are based on the mean of the monitoring data plus two standard deviations, there is a 5% probability of an exceedance for any single result with no actual change in the ground water quality. Also, field and laboratory errors could cause a recorded exceedance. Investigation will help avoid false positive values interfering with the post-corrective action monitoring success.

If an investigation reveals a cause for an exceedance other than the actual ground water quality, normal monitoring will continue. The results of the investigation documenting that the actual ground water quality is not the cause of exceedance will be provided verbally to the NRC within three working days and in writing within 30 days. The same notification process will be followed if the examination described above cannot rule out that the actual ground water quality is the cause. ECMC will then review with NRC what steps should be taken to correct the deviation from the ACL.

ECMC expects that the future data will continue to meet the proposed **ACL** values based on past results. Without approval of the ACLs, the final reclamation of the tailings basin could be significantly delayed.

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Appendix 6

A Comprehensive Risk Assessment for the Health and Environmental Concentrations at the. Proposed Points of Exposure for Nickel, Radium and Uranium at the Highland Reclamation Project

Appendix 7

Updated and Expanded Review of Potential Corrective Action Plans (ALARA DEMONSTRATION)

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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

1.0 REPORT FORMAT

When figures or sections of previous reports are referenced, a reference is provided in parenthesis. If none is given, the reader may assume the figure or section is in this report.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This submittal supports Exxon's application for Alternate Concentration Limits (ACLs) for the Point of Compliance (POC) monitor wells at the Highland Reclamation Project tailings basin. The NRC selected the POC wells after the agency made a detailed review of the Exxon data.

Exxon Corporation, c/o Exxon Coal and Minerals Company, possesses the Highland uranium tailings basin in Converse County, Wyoming under License No. SUA-1 139. Figure 1.1 on the next page shows the location of Highland within the Powder River Basin of Wyoming.

Exxon, then known as Standard Oil Company of New Jersey and operating as Humble Oil and Refining Company, began conventional milling at Highland in October 1972. Atomic Energy Commission License No. SUA-1 139 issued October 5, 1972 authorized this activity. Exxon owned and operated the uranium mines at Highland that provided the ore for the mill. Small volumes of ore were toll milled for two other companies. The first Final Environmental Statement (FES) issued by the Atomic Energy Commission for a uranium mine and mill was for Highland. This FES addressed the expected ground water impacts due to tailings disposal. The operations were approved with the understanding that ground water impacts would occur. No ground water remediation was proposed and none was required by the licensing agency. Site characteristics, milling processes, tailings disposal options and ore characteristics are among the topics discussed in the FES. Additional details on Highland operations are provided in the "Supplemental Environmental Report" by Exxon Company, U.S.A., August 1977.

Milling operations ended in 1984. By 1989 all but twenty acres of the tailings basin had been reclaimed. This twenty acres (the wick area) near the center of the basin is fully stabilized but only partially reclaimed for two reasons. First, a portion of this area contains an evaporation pond for recovered ground water. The evaporation pond is a necessary consequence of the ground water Corrective Action Program (CAP) discussed in this report. The presence of the evaporation pond prevents completion of the remaining tailings basin reclamation. Second, tailings under this area continue to consolidate. Exxon is committed by Condition 40 of the license and Exxon's letter of July **27,** 1989, to wait until tailings consolidation is ninety percent complete before completing the wick area reclamation. Consolidation has noticeably slowed in the past five years; indicating consolidation is nearly complete.

In 1986 the NRC sampled and analyzed the tailings basin liquid for organic, inorganic and radioactive constituents (NRC, September 19, 1986). The analyses found sufficient concentrations of some inorganic elements and radionuclides to be considered Potentially Hazardous Constituents (PHCs). No organic compounds were detected in significant concentrations. These 1986 results are the best available analytical description of the source of the impacts on ground water.

FIGURE 1.1

RELIEF MAP OF POWDER RIVER BASIN, WYOMING AND.ADJACENT MOUNTAINS (FROM WYOMING GEOLOGICAL ASSOC. GUIDEBOOK, 1958)

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In 1988 (Exxon, January 29, 1988), per NRC instructions (Amendment No. 13), Exxon reported completion of a formal leak detection program that confirmed the basin seeped liquid into the uppermost aquifer as predicted in the FES and as seen in earlier monitoring data. Later in 1988 (Exxon, December 29, 1988) Exxon reported completion of a PHC detection monitoring program at the request of the NRC (Amendment No. 23) that measured PHCs at the existing wells and new wells approved by the amendment. This program involved monitoring at the background wells and other monitor wells either in the upper most'aquifer or in mine backfill areas near the tailings basin. The concentrations of inorganic elements and radionuclides found in the NRC samples in 1986 and others commonly associated with uranium tailings were measured. The monitoring results allowed elimination of beryllium, fluoride, mercury, molybdenum, silver and vanadium from further monitoring as these were not detected at the monitor wells or were only found at insignificant concentrations. These elements are not considered PHCs at Highland.

After NRC reviewed the compliance monitoring data, the agency amended the license in 1988 (Amendment No. 27) to include Ground Water Protection Limits (GPLs) for the PHCs detected at significant concentrations. The GPLs were to be met at four monitor wells that were selected by NRC to be Point of Compliance Wells. These are wells 125, 175, 176 and 177. These four wells are north, south, east and west of the tailing basin. These were sensible choices since the pond had created a seepage mound with liquid flowing outwards in all four directions.

Exxon had found concentrations at most of the POCs in excess of most of the GPLs. In Amendment No. 27 the NRC placed a requirement in the license to develop a corrective action program due to exceedance of the GPLs at the POCs. For this application it is important to emphasize that the POCs were selected by the NRC and were not proposed by Exxon. Exxon had no objection to the NRC choices.

Exxon submitted a corrective action program in 1989 (Exxon 1989). The program included reducing future infiltration by surface reclamation and allowing natural processes to mitigate the ground water impacts to achieve the NRC mandated GPLs. This was the plan envisioned in the FES. WWL 1989 showed no practicable technology could achieve the license standards sooner than could be achieved by natural processes. Exxon proposed ACLs (Exxon 1989) that were protective of human health and the environment at the potential Points of Exposure (POEs) and were As Low As Reasonably Achievable (ALARA).

NRC denied approval of the proposed ACLs and instructed Exxon to prepare another corrective action program (NRC, July 3, 1989). NRC stated, "Selective pumping of wells with elevated levels of hazardous constituents will reduce hazardous constituent concentrations in the aquifer." NRC also stated, "with reasonable efforts, considerable improvement in the future ground-water quality can be accomplished at the site. Due to this, we are unable to approve your request for alternate concentration limits at this time." NRC further stated, "Following operation of your corrective action program and based upon the monitoring gained during its operation, an alternate concentration limit proposal-would be appropriate."

In response to the NRC recommendation, Exxon proposed the current Corrective Action Program (CAP) that includes pumping from wells in the area of the highest concentrations of PHCs and disposing of the water in an evaporation pond (Exxon August 15, 1989). NRC approved this Program and deferred approving ACLs pending a demonstration through pumping of what the ALARA concentrations would be (License Amendment No. 32). NRC stated: "On a separate but related matter, you are correct in stating that the monitoring results obtained from this program may supply sufficient data for the issue of alternative concentration

limits to be revisited. Please understand that it is the responsibility of Exxon to demonstrate that concentrations of hazardous constituents have been reduced to levels as low as reasonably achievable. With this consideration in mind, adequate collection of water quality, water level and pumping rate data is essential to provide a basis for your determination that levels as low as reasonably achievable will have been achieved."

Most of the PHCs now meet the current NRC GPLs. PHC concentrations have improved at both **POC** wells that are part of the CAP pumping and those that are not. Of ten PHCs specified in the license, seven are now in compliance with the GPLs. The UNAT concentrations remain above the limit at one of the four POC wells and are not declining. Also, the Ni concentration is above the limit at one well and is not declining. The Ra $226 + 228$ concentration at one well is above the limit and is not declining. POC Well 177 is now dry. The UNAT concentration still exceeded the GPL before the well went dry. The concentrations at these wells are not declining after nine years of seepage recovery.

There is no potential for human or ecosystem exposure to the three PHCs that remain above the GPLs because these are confined to Exxon property close to the tailings basin. The nearest home is nearly two miles away. There are no nearby livestock or other agricultural wells within a one-mile radius. The remote Highland location makes the ground water unattractive to development. Sections 2 and 4 of this report describe the rationale, which results in the conclusion that there are no health or environmental consequences of the current situation.

Exxon, therefore, is seeking approval of ACLs for UNAT, Ni and Ra 226 + 228 to enable ground water pumping to end and to remove this impediment to completing final reclamation of the tailings basin.

1.2 Facility Description

In 1968, Exxon discovered a significant uranium deposit in Converse County, 35 miles north of Douglas, Wyoming, which became known as the Highland property. Uranium was removed from the deposit through surface, underground, and in-situ mining. Overburden removal at the surface mine was initiated in September, 1970, and the first ore was milled in October, 1972. The surface mine was operated until 1984 when major reclamation activities commenced. Underground mining began in 1973 with the sinking of the Buffalo Shaft and in 1976 lateral development at two levels began. The track drift, located at a depth of 600 feet, was used for ore haulage and water control while active mining occurred at a depth of 550 feet. Actual ore production started in 1977 and continued until 1982. In-situ mining occurred in a pilot mine that was initiated in 1972, expanded in 1979, and terminated in 1981. Ground water restoration was completed in 1986.

The surface mine is of most importance with respect to Exxon's submittal. It is likely that the underground mine has an impact on water levels in the area, but these effects are not considered important with regard to water quality.. The dewatering associated with the underground mine does have an impact on the length of time necessary for ground water levels to recover. The effects of the in-situ mine on water quality and water levels are believed to be minimal since the injection and production wells were sealed from the Tailings Dam Sandstone (TDSS) aquifer. Other mines in the area such as the TVA Golden Eagle underground mine development, west of Highland, also contributed to the drawdown of the water level.

The surface mine was a typical truck/shovel operation in which overburden was removed to reach the ore zones. As mining moved downdip, overburden and waste rock which contained some low-grade uranium and other associated elements was placed back in previously mined out pits. A total of four pits were developed. At the end of operations, the two final pits were left open to become Highland Reservoir. The layout of the surface facilities at the Highland site is shown on Figure 1.2. This figure also shows the current restricted area boundary and the proposed perpetual monitoring area boundary.

The Highland mill used a conventional acid leach-solvent extraction process to remove uranium from the ore. Production of yellowcake commenced in October 1972 when ore was processed at a rate of about 2,200 tons per day. In 1974, the milling capacity was increased to 3,000 tons per day. Half of the mill was decommissioned and reclamation of the mill site commenced in 1984. The other half of the mill is now part of the Power Resource, Inc. Highland Uranium Operations.

The mill tailings were deposited in an above grade impoundment formed by damming an unnamed tributary to the North Fork of Box Creek. It should be noted that many reports and descriptions of the site indicated that the North Fork of Box Creek was dammed to form the tailings basin. Actually the dam was built on an unnamed ephemeral tributary of the creek. The North Fork of Box Creek runs south of the Highland Property. Before the mine was developed, the unnamed tributary ran through what is now the tailings basin area. However, construction of the tailings basin and two mine overburden piles have filled the tributary west of the tailings dam. The layout of the tailings basin, backfilled mine area and lake relative to the North Fork of Box Creek is shown on Figure 1.2 at the end of this section. The figure provides the topography of the Highland site showing the site features and monitor well locations. It also shows the outline of the current restricted area and the outline of the land Exxon has proposed . for transfer to government ownership when the license is terminated.

Tailings were deposited in the tailings basin from October 1972, until June 1984. Since 1984, reclamation has been nearly completed in accordance with the NRC approved construction specifications.

Many of the monitor wells are described in an Exxon Production Research Company report (EPRCO, 1982). The others are described in either the "Phase 2 Final Report Exxon Highland. Tailings Basin Seepage Analysis" (WWL, March, 1988), or an Exxon license amendment application (Exxon December 29, 1988).

Ground water monitoring is carried out in accordance with Conditions 22, 33, and 38 of license SUA-1 139. The monitoring procedures are documented. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) "Procedures Manual for Ground Water Monitoring at Solid Waste Disposal Facilities" was used in preparing the Highland procedures. Sample pH is measured at Highland. An EPA certified private laboratory performs the other water quality parameters reported to the NRC.

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1.3 Extent of Ground Water Contamination

1.3.1 Geologic Setting

The Highland site is located in the Powder River basin of northeastern Wyoming. This, basin has an area of about 12,000 square miles and is bounded on the west by the Big Horn Mountains and the Casper Arch, on the south by the Laramie Mountains and the Hartville Uplift, and on the east by the Black Hills. To the north the basin gradually terminates as it enters into Montana. Mining districts, primarily coal and uranium, are abundant in the basin.

The basin topography consists of moderate relief covered with sagebrush with rolling hills occurring between flat-topped highlands and wide gentle drainages. Elevations generally range from 4,500 to 5,500 feet except in the central part of the basin near Pumpkin Buttes where elevations rise to 6,000 feet. At the site, surface elevations range from about 5,100 feet in the drainages to the east of the tailings basin to as much as 5,400 feet at some of the higher hills to the west.

The northern end and western portions of the Powder River basin are drained by the Powder River that flows to the north into Montana. In the southern part of the basin, the principal drainage is the Cheyenne River that flows in an easterly direction. The primary drainage in the Highland vicinity is Box Creek (the North Fork of Box Creek flows along the southern boundary of the site) which is a tributary to Lance Creek which is in turn a tributary to the Cheyenne River. At the site, the North Fork of Box Creek is ephemeral in nature. That is, it normally does not contain surface water except in a few isolated pockets and it only runs during major precipitation events or during rapid snow melt.

The Power River Basin is an asymmetric syncline with its axis displaced several miles west of the center of the basin. The Highland ore deposit lies approximately parallel to the axis of the syncline and about two miles east of it. On the east side of the basin dips are generally on the order of three degrees or less but are much steeper on the southwest and west sides near the margins of the basin. Faulting is generally localized and small-scale and has been mapped primarily in the mineralized areas near Pumpkin Buttes, Monument Hill and Box Creek.

The local geology consists of interbedded fine-to-coarse grained sandstone, siltstone, and clay stone (EPRCO, 1982). A generalized stratigraphic column for the Highland area is shown on Figure 1.3. The primary hydrogeologic units at the site, in order of increasing depth, are the Fowler Sand, the Tailings Dam Sandstone (TDSS), the Tailings Dam Shale (TDSh), and the Highland Ore Sands (50SS, 40SS, and 30SS). The TDSS and the TDSh are the units of interest and the discussion in the remainder of this section is directed at these units.

1.3.1.1 Tailings Dam Sandstone. The TDSS is the unit of primary interest since it is the uppermost aquifer in the vicinity. The TDSS outcrops in the area to the east of the Tailings Dam in the channel eroded by the unnamed ephemeral tributary to the North Fork of Box Creek (which was dammed to form the tailings basin). It is believed that erosion had exposed the **TDSS** in the tailings basin upstream of and beneath the dam. The exposed area was covered with tailings but it is presumed that it provided a relatively direct pathway for tailings fluid to migrate into the TDSS. This condition was known and considered when the tailings basin was permitted by the AEC and was constructed.

Because the TDSS unit is of most importance with regard to ground water impacts, a structure map for the top of the TDSS was prepared and is presented as Figure 1.4. The top of the

Adapted from EPRCo, 1983

FIGURE 1.3 GENERALIZED STRATIGRAPHIC COLUMN, HIGHLAND AREA

TOP OF TAILINGS DAM SANDSTONE STRUCTURE MAP

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Figure 1.4

TDSS structural map is useful for locating areas in which confined conditions exist. In addition, this map can be coupled with a similar map for the TDSh to accurately estimate volumes of rock through which seepage water might move.

The structural map for the top of the TDSS was developed using data from wells in the vicinity of the tailings basin. Geologic cross-sections provided in the EPRCO (1982) report were also utilized to fill in areas missing data. The EPRCO cross-sections were derived from a geologic model developed from a large number of drill holes. The EPRCO cross-sections provided the only source of data for some of the areas where drill hole data were sparse. Also, logs for a few holes to the south and west of the lake and backfill areas were located and utilized in preparation of the structure map in this document. These logs were especially useful in defining the geology south of the North Fork of Box Creek.

1.3.1.2 Tailings Dam Shale. The TDSh is of interest for two reasons. First, this unit, which has been described as the most laterally extensive rock stratum encountered at the Highland site (EPRCO, 1982), exhibits low permeability and retards seepage from the TDSS into the underlying sandstone units. In addition, studies performed by EPRCO (1982) indicate that the shales in the area are geochemically superior to the sandstones with regard to both neutralizing and attenuating capacities. Second, the TDSh forms the lower boundary of the TDSS so that accurate estimates of the TDSS rock volume and water storage volume require that the surface configuration of the TDSh be known relatively well. The surface structure of the TDSh also provides insight into flow boundaries during various periods of water level fluctuation at the site.

A map depicting the structure of the surface of the TDSh is presented on Figure 1.5. This map was prepared in the same manner as the top of TDSS structure map. The map is consistent with other interpretations and the regional interpretation of the geology of the site.

An important aspect of the TDSh structure is the elevation at which the ephemeral streams cut through the TDSS. As Figure 1.5 shows, the estimated elevation of the discharge point in the unnamed tributary to the east of the tailings basin is about 5,116 feet. This elevation was deduced from geotechnical borings installed during initial construction of the dam. At the location where the North Fork of Box Creek has eroded through the TDSS down to the shale, the elevation is estimated to be 5,102 feet. Thus, the major discharge from the TDSS to surface water would be at the North Fork of Box Creek site to the south of the mine and the tailings basin. Mine backfill lies between the discharge point and the tailings basin.

1.3.2 Hydrologic Setting

The climate of the Highland site is semi-arid and cool. Annual precipitation averages about 12 inches while the average lake evaporation rate is about 44 inches per year. Average summer temperatures are in the high 60s to low 70s while average winter temperatures are in the mid 20s. Extreme temperatures may exceed 100 $^{\circ}$ F in the summer and may fall to -40 $^{\circ}$ F or lower in the winter.

Surface water in the area is sparse and before mining commenced was generally limited to the ephemeral streams which drain the area. As described previously, the final mine pits were left

TOP OF **TAILINGS** DAM **SHALE STRUCTURE** MAP

Figure 1.5

open and have become a lake, which is the most prominent surface water feature in the vicinity of the tailings basin.

The direction of regional ground water flow is to the northeast or, generally, up dip. The principal recharge area for the aquifers of interest is thought to be the outcrop areas in the vicinity of Blizzard Heights several miles west of the site. Prior to the initiation of operations, it is likely that flow in the TDSS was essentially in an easterly direction with discharge occurring in the outcrop area in the North Fork of Box Creek to the south of the lake. Near the discharge area, it is likely that unconfined conditions existed with confined conditions occurring to the north and west (downdip).

As the top of TDSh structure map presented on Figure 1.5 indicates, the outcrop elevation east of the tailings dam is several feet higher than that in the North Fork of Box Creek. Therefore, it is likely that the North Fork of Box Creek outcrop serves as the primary discharge area for the TDSS flow system at an elevation of 5,102 feet.

It is postulated that the outcrop area in the vicinity of the tailings dam served as a local discharge and recharge area prior to construction of the dam. It is probable that during times of large infiltration, such as during the spring snow melt, that it served as a discharge area as water levels in the immediate area increased in response to the infiltration. During dry times, it likely served as a local recharge area during those brief periods when flow occurred in the stream and ground water flowed back toward the primary discharge area in the North Fork of Box Creek. Under these conditions, the water table in between the two outcrop areas would be expected to be relatively flat with most of the ground water beneath the tailings basin being relatively stagnant.

During operation, seepage from the tailings basin resulted in the development of a ground water mound under and around the tailings basin. As the mound grew, it eventually reached an elevation that caused seepage to occur into the alluvial deposits located downstream of the dam. It should be noted that the center of the foundation of the dam was keyed into the TDSh to minimize seepage losses through the TDSS beneath the dam to increase dam stability. The wings of the dam were not keyed into the shale, which explains why seepage was found emanating from springs located downstream of the dam early in the operating life. In about 1975, a sump system was constructed to capture the seepage water and pump it back to the tailings basin.

As the ground water mound grew beneath the tailings basin, mining activities in the mine pits to the southwest of the basin resulted in substantial drawdown and formation of a ground water sink. Since the base of the pits extended down into the Ore Sands, the pit also served to dewater the TDSS. Figure 1.6 presents a piezometric surface map for April 1982 when the mound appears to have reached its maximum elevation. The combined effects of the mound and the sink caused by the pits are apparent. Given the small discharges measured to the east of the dam, it seems likely that most of the seepage from the tailings basin flowed toward the pit during active operations.

The permeability of the TDSS has been estimated at various locations in the vicinity. Several tests were conducted by EPRCO as part of their 1982 seepage study. A local consultant (Hydro-Engineering, 1987) reported results of well testing performed in the TDSS. In addition,

PIEZOMETRIC SURFACE MAP - APRIL 1982

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Figure 1.6

all of the wells installed in 1988 were slug tested in 1989 and analyzed as described by WWL (WWL, 1989). A summary of permeability testing results for the site is presented in Table 1.1.

A piezometric surface map for late 1988 is presented on Figure 1.7. The overwhelming effects of the ground water sink caused by the unsaturated backfill and lake to the south and west of the tailings basin are obvious.

TABLE 1.1

SUMMARY OF PERMEABILITY ESTIMATES

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PIEZOMETRIC **SURFACE** MAP - DECEMBER **1988**

Figure 1.7

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Comparison of Figures 1.6 and 1.7 indicates that water levels in the immediate vicinity of the tailings basin had declined in excess of 30 feet in some of the wells by 1988. Plots of water levels as a function of time for all available data were presented in the December 1988 submittal to the NRC and demonstrated the relatively rapid rate at which the mound was declining. Since discharge to the sump system to the east of the dam ceased in July 1987 it is concluded that inflow into the backfill area is largely responsible for dissipation of the mound.

Based on the previous discussion, it is obvious that the backfilled mine pits and reclamation lake are the prominent features with regard to ground water flow in the TDSS. It should be noted that inflow to the lake and backfill also occurs from the Ore Sands thereby reducing the time necessary for the lake to fill. In addition, some surface water runoff reaches the lake to accelerate its filling. Nonetheless, the results of an EPRCO study (EPRCO 1983) indicate that it will take 100 years or more after cessation of operations for the lake to recover to its ultimate level. Until it is completely recovered, the seepage mound will continue to dissipate by flowing into the backfill area. Figure 1.8 depicts the predicted and measured water levels in the lake as a function of time. While it appears that the 1983 predicted and measured levels match relatively well, there is evidence that the actual levels are lagging the predicted levels. It is believed that the inflows from the TDSS are reduced over what was predicted by the 1983 EPRCO lake model. Because the EPRCO lake model was based on an analytical ground water inflow equation, it is unlikely that the time computed for the lake to fill included time necessary to resaturate the TDSS. This would tend to increase the amount of time required for the lake to fill. The steady state Visual MODFLOW model of Highland summarized in Figure 12 of Appendix 3 indicates the reservoir will fill to a slightly higher ultimate elevation than EPRCO predicted in 1983.

As the previous discussion indicates, the ground water flow regime in the vicinity of the tailings basin is transient in nature but these conditions are expected to remain for a significant time into the future. While the declining water levels beneath the basin are judged to be beneficial in terms of removing contaminated water to the treatment area (backfilled pit), they do create some problems with regard to the mobility of certain constituents, particularly the class of elements called metalloids (Cr, Se, As, Mo, UNAT). The mobility of these materials tends to be very dependent on oxidation potential which will be maintained at a high level during conditions associated with a falling water table. Only one of the metalloids, UNAT, remains in excess of the GPLs at two POC wells (Well 125 and Well 177 that went dry in 1996).

After the lake has been filled to capacity and the TDSS to the east of the lake is resaturated to the ultimate lake elevation, it is anticipated that conditions similar to those that existed prior to the initiation of operations will be re-established. The major difference is that recharge which is thought to have occurred in the area to the east of the tailings dam will no longer occur because the TDSS outcrop has been buried by reclamation of the dam. Therefore, it is expected that ground water beneath the tailings basin will be stagnant. These steady state conditions are ideal for the establishment of reducing conditions beneath the tailings basin which should eventually immobilize most of the hazardous constituents of interest.

Figures 1.7 and Figure 1 of Appendix 3 show the piezometric surface within the TDSS in December of 1988 and the third quarter of 1996, respectively. The maximum saturated thickness at a ground water recovery well is now about 21 feet at Well 175. The saturated thicknesses at the other recovery wells 117, 177 and 178 are currently about 6, 0 and 7 feet, respectively. Figure 1.9 shows the change in the TDSS saturated thickness between 1988 and 1994.

On Figure 4 of Appendix 3 a line is shown that indicates the approximate location of the chloride ion front in 1988 discussed below. Two interpretations are given that are discussed in Section 3 of the Appendix. The water production rates at the recovery wells are discussed in Section 3 of the main body of this report.

The chloride ion front has been identified as the best indicator of tailings seepage (See WWL, 1989, Section 2.2.5 "Conservative/Indicator Constituents"). Some change in the location of the chloride front has occurred since 1988 (see Figure 6 in Appendix 3). In nearly all directions the front has retreated.

The principal ground water flow direction for the seepage water is now towards the mine backfill area as shown on Figure 1 of Appendix 3. The mine backfill exhibits high porosity and high geochemical attenuation potential but low permeability. These three properties exist because the backfill is a random mixture of sandstones and shales. The dilution from the high porosity and geochemical attenuation from the sandstone, shale mixture within the backfill results in only modest impacts on the backfill water quality from seepage. The backfill itself contains low grade uranium mineralization that contributes radionuclides to the backfill waters. For this reason the backfill waters generally exhibit uranium and radium concentrations exceeding those around the tailings basin. Due to low mine backfill permeability, the area is not considered a viable source of usable quantities of ground water. Also, Exxon found it very difficult to complete wells in the mine backfill. The holes drilled tended to collapse before and during placement of the screened well casing, making well completion very frustrating. The unsaturated portion of the hole generally would stay open but the saturated portion collapsed.

The TDSS contained an estimated **1.7** billion gallons of contaminated water in 1988 within the chloride front. Of this, 280 million gallons was in the most contaminated area between the tailings basin and the mine backfill (called the finger area). See Section 4 of Appendix 3 for details of this discussion.

In the first half of 1996 the total contaminated water and finger area volumes had declined to approximately 1 billion gallons and 132 million gallons, respectively. These volumes are based on the TDSS estimated porosity of 34% (EPRCO, 1982). Less than a third of the water in the saturated portion of the TDSS can be drained by gravity to a well. That is, the estimated specific yield is about one third of the porosity (WWL, 1989).

Based on a specific yield of 0.1, the total and finger area water volumes capable of draining from the TDSS were 0.6 billion and 80 million in 1989 versus 294 million and 39 million in 1996. This indicates that between April 1989 and September 1996, 0.3 billion gallons total and 41 million gallons in the finger area drained from the chloride front, primarily to the mine backfill and recovery wells, without extending the front.

These volume reductions are equivalent to flows of 80 gallons per minute in total and 11 gallons per minute from the finger area. From Figure 1.6 the ground water flowed radially from the tailings basin through the TDSS in 1982. This flow pattern has been largely supplanted by a

Figure 1.9

- 15 - 25 - 35

CHANGE IN SATURATED THICKNESS OF DECEMBER 1988 -FIRST QUARTER 1994 **⁰**2000 FT **A j FEET** | 12/07/94 3F248351 .nre (2 of 3) western flow from the tailing basin towards the mine backfill and Highland Reservoir by 1996 as shown in Figure 1 of Appendix 3. The ground water recovery system captured 14 million of the 41 million gallons that left the finger area between 1988 and mid-1996. The other 27 million gallons primarily entered the mine backfill.

In summary, the significant tailings seepage is confined to the TDSS in an area that contained a recoverable volume of 0.6 billion gallons of water in 1989 and 0.3 billion in 1996. The most contaminated water is in the finger area. This area has been the focus of the ground water protection program. The finger area of the TDSS contained a recoverable volume of about 80 million gallons in 1988. This declined to 39 million gallons by 1996 with the CAP responsible for about 34% of the reduction. The other 66% drained to the mine backfill where the water is unavailable to future use and where natural attenuation has improved the overall water quality.

1.4 Current Ground Water Protection Limits

On February 8, 1989, the NRC issued Amendment No. 27 to SUA-1139 revising License Condition 33 and instructing Exxon to implement a compliance monitoring program and to submit a corrective action program. The program was to return ground water concentrations of listed PHCs to GPLs set by the NRC in the license amendment. The GPLs (License condition No. 33B) equal the background concentrations at Well 182 (see Exxon December 29, 1988, submittal) or the EPA established Maximum Concentration Limits (MCLs) for public water supplies listed in Table 5C of Appendix A, whichever is higher.

1.5 Compliance with Current Ground Water Protection Limits

Attachments 3A, 3B, 3C, 3E AND 3F of the Exxon August 12, 1998, letter of the semiannual environmental monitoring results contain the water quality data from 1988 through the second quarter of 1998 for the TDSS POC wells, the TDSS Monitor Wells, the TDSS Background Monitor Wells, and the Mine Backfill Wells, respectively. From an inspection of the POC data in Attachment 3A it is obvious the cadmium, chromium, lead, selenium, gross alpha and thorium-230 concentrations are lower than the current GPLs. Virtually all the results since 1993 for these parameters are below the limits. The same can be said of the other TDSS monitor wells with the exception of selenium at Well 112. This is a localized condition unique to this well and not a result of selenium from the tailings basin (see selenium section of Appendix 5).

The fact that some of the nickel, radium and uranium measurements at some of the POC wells exceed the GPLs does not by itself prove non-compliance. EPA has developed statistical tools for judging compliance that are found in the February, 1989 Interim Final Guidance document titled "Statistical Analysis Of Ground-Water Monitoring Data At RCRA Facilities - Interim Final Guidance" (EPA, 1989). Section 4.2.2 and 6 of the guidance document ("Coefficient - of - Variation Test" and "Comparisons with MCLs or ACLs", respectively) are the most relevant part of the EPA document for comparing Highland POC data to the GPLs.

In the guidance document, EPA recommends a determination be made of whether the data for a particular PHC at a **POC** well follows a normal or lognormal distribution. If so, a Confidence Interval can be calculated at a confidence level of 98% from the appropriate mean, the standard deviation, and the size of the sample population. If the data does not follow a normal or lognormal distribution, the guidance document provides a non-parametric statistical method for establishing the Confidence Limits. EPA judges a PHC to be in non-compliance at a POC if the lower bound of the Confidence Limit exceeds the GPL.

The table below summarizes the Appendix 2 statistical analyses of the POC nickel, radium and natural uranium concentrations.

TABLE 1.2 SUMMARY OF GPL COMPLIANCE BY STATISTICAL ANALYSIS (FOR POC WELLS - NICKEL, RADIUM AND URANIUM)

NOTES: Nickel (Ni) in mg/I, Radium 226+228 (Ra 226+228) in pCi/I, uranium (UNAT) in pCi/I.

> *Additional statistical analysis performed since concentrations were increasing in earlier years.

By these statistical analyses the uranium concentrations exceed the GPL at POC Wells 125 and 177 (before it went dry). The nickel concentration exceeds the GPL at POC Well 175. The radium 226+228 concentrations exceed the GPL at **POC** Well 175. **POC** Well 176 meets all the GPLs. Well 177 has been dry since 1996 so the data analyzed is for 1988-1996.

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2. HAZARD ASSESSMENT

2.1 Source and Contamination Characterization

The Highland Mill began operating in October of 1972. Operations ended in June of 1984. Tailings fluid recycling to the mill to remove uranium continued until September 1984. In addition to the milling operation, Exxon operated a solid resin ion exchange system to recover uranium from the tailing fluid from 1977 through the end of ore milling.

Some 10.5 million tons of uranium ore were processed, containing an average U_3O_8 concentration of 0.1%. The mill achieved uranium recoveries of about 94%. The ore was relatively simple without significant concentrations of the vanadium or molybdenum typical of many other uranium ores.

The mill employed a conventional dry crusher and wet rod mill to separate the individual grains of sand, silt and clay particles. The resulting ore slurry was leached in wood stave tanks for six to eight hours with sulfuric acid and sodium chlorate at a pH of between 1 and 1.5.

The solubilized uranium was separated from the barren ore solids (tailings) through conventional countercurrent decantation using a series of thickeners. The uranium liquor was processed by liquid ion exchange (solvent extraction) to yield a rich eluate ready for uranium precipitation and drying. The ion exchange was highly specific for uranium. Other elements solubilized by leaching were discharged with the tailing.

The tailings were pumped at about 35% solids by weight to the tailings basin. The tailings slurry pH was between 2.5 and 3.5. The tailings basin was constructed by placing an earthen dam with a compacted clay core across a natural valley to create an impoundment. As approved by the AEC and the NRC and as discussed in the 1973 Final Environmental Statement (FES), the tailings basin was not lined, and seepage occurred into the foundation rock strata as expected. As acknowledged in the FES, this reduced the quality of water near the basin in an area with little potential for ground water development.

Exxon Production Research Company (EPRCO) examined the geology and ground water hydrology of the tailings basin. The results of this examination were reported in the 1982 study entitled "Highland Uranium Tailings Impoundment Seepage Study" (EPRCO, 1982).

The strata in contact with the tailings include the Fowler Formation (or Fowler Sand) and the Tailings Dam Sandstone (TDSS). The Fowler Formation lies above the TDSS and consists of a series of discontinuous sandstones interbedded with mudstones, claystones and shales. It underlies most of the tailings basin. It dips to the west like the other formations at Highland and was sliced through by the open pit mine which prevented any movement through the Fowler Formation in the down dip direction to the southwest, west or northwest.

The TDSS underlies the Fowler Formation and is only in direct contact with the tailings in a small area at the east end of the tailings basin. The TDSS is in turn underlain by the Tailings Dam Shale (TDSh) which is a thick aquitard. The 1982 EPRCO study reported the TDSh has excellent attenuation properties for the Potentially Hazardous Constituents (PHCs). Thus, the Fowler Formation and the TDSS constituted the uppermost aquifer during operations.

When milling began the tailings basin seepage rate initially increased into the underlying strata as the basin filled but then stabilized and eventually began to decline. It is surmised that the clay fraction of the tailings and gypsum precipitation reduced the permeability of the Tailings Dam Sandstone (TDSS) over time, thereby slowing the seepage. The reduced permeability of the tailings as they consolidated under their own weight also gradually reduced the seepage into the underlying foundation strata.

After milling operations ceased in 1984, the Fowler Formation drained, so the TDSS is now considered the upper most aquifer. The Fowler Formation will not resaturate in the future around the tailings basin because the formations elevation is above the pre-mining and expected post mining ground water levels.

In August 1986, the NRC sampled the Highland tailings liquid and EPA analyzed it for organic and inorganic constituents. The results served as the principal basis for deciding which PHCs to measure in the TDSS monitor wells during the hazardous and non-hazardous constituent detection program required under License Amendment No. 23, issued on June 15, 1988. The EPA found no organic constituents in the tailings fluid.

The detection program collected data on the parameters listed in the following table.

TABLE 2.1 - AMENDMENT No. 23 PARAMETERS

Potentially Hazardous - Non-Radioactive

Beryllium Nickel Chromium Silver **Mercury**

Arsenic Molybdenum Cadmium Selenium Lead Vanadium

Potentially Hazardous - Radioactive Gross Alpha Thorium-230

Radium-226 Uranium Radium-228

Non-Hazardous - Non-Radioactive Fluoride Sulfate Sulfate

PH

Nitrate Total Dissolved Solids

After Exxon submitted the detection program results to the NRC on December 29, 1988, the agency removed beryllium, fluorine, mercury, molybdenum, silver and vanadium from the requirements for future monitoring in Amendment No. 27 since these elements were not detected at the monitor wells in significant concentrations.

Tailings basin surface reclamation is nearly complete in accordance with Condition 40 of License SUA-1 139 and 10 CFR Part 40, Appendix A. Reclamation reports submitted to the NRC include "Construction Quality Assurance Testing for Reclamation of the Uranium Tailings Basin at the Highland Reclamation Project" by WWL, April, 1991 and " Response To NRC

Inspection Report No. 40 - 8102/91-01" by WWL, November, 1993. Current waste management includes ground water recovery in keeping with the Corrective Action Program (CAP), ground water monitoring, monthly surface inspections and quarterly surface settlement surveys. The CAP is a principal impediment to final completion of the remaining tailings basin reclamation.

2.2 Rate and Direction of Transport Assessment

Th 1982 EPRCO report contained the results of an extensive contaminant modeling study. Figures 56 through 61 and Figure 63 of that study summarize the modeling results.

The EPRCO study concluded some tailings liquid constituents would migrate at essentially the same rate from the tailings basin as the water itself. These constituents, such as chloride, would only be attenuated by dilution through mixing with naturally occurring ground water containing lower concentrations of dissolved constituents.

Conversely, EPRCO concluded the Fowler Formation and the TDSS would substantially retard the advance of most Potentially Hazardous Constituents (POCs) through chemical and physical processes. Figure 56 (EPRCO, 1982) shows the EPRCO prediction of the farthest reach of the low pH front through 1992. Figure 61 (EPRCO, 1982) shows the maximum predicted advance by 1995 with the front retreating thereafter when the TDSS began resaturating as Highland Reservoir filled. The retreat has been delayed by the slower than predicted rise of the reservoir water level. This will allow the TDSS more time to drain to the mine backfill area before resaturation of the TDSS begins. This is beneficial because the mine backfill immobilizes PHCs.

)/ Table 3A through 3C and 3E through 3F in Appendix 1 show the 1988 through mid 1998 water quality in the TDSS, the mine backfill and Highland Reservoir. These results are compared to the EPRCO predictions in Appendix 5. In summary, the 1988-1998 data are in general agreement with the EPRCO predictions. The PHCs are confined to the area close to the tailings basin in the area between the tailings basin and the mine backfill. Table 3D is not included in Appendix 1 since it provides data from the ore sands aquifer below the TDSh that is not part of the uppermost aquifer. Table 3D is provided in the semiannual reports of environmental data sent to the NRC.

Some PHCs were at higher concentrations at the POC wells in the 1980's than now. These include cadmium, chromium, lead and thorium-230. These PHCs have virtually disappeared at the monitor wells since 1989 and now agree with the EPRCO prediction of very limited movement through the TDSS.

Section 2 and Figure 1 of Appendix 3 provide the current rate and direction of ground water flow in the TDSS.

2.3 Exposure Assessment

2.3.1 Resource Classification and Water Use

During the Exxon mining operations there was no development of the TDSS ground water within a one mile radius of the tailings basin other than the Exxon uranium mining related dewatering wells and pits (see Exxon's May 3, 1988 update of 1986 land use survey).

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Ground water enters Highland Reservoir at approximately 300 gallons per minute. Potentially, Highland Reservoir could provide water in the future for livestock, wildlife, and agriculture consumption.

The only use of ground water developed by man other than that related to uranium mining within a two mile radius has been for livestock and wildlife watering. Livestock grazing served by any single water source is limited to less than six months per year. Such locations are outside the area impacted by tailings basin seepage. The closest is a spring about a mile north-northeast of the tailings basin. The spring is not fed by the TDSS.

The aquifers in the region are either too unproductive or too deep for economic use for irrigation except when uranium mining operations have made surplus mine water available (not tailings water).

Table 2.2 on the next page compares the 1997 TDSS background well, **POC** well and the Highland Reservoir water quality to the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, Water Quality Division, Underground Water Suitability Standards (Wyoming Standards) for domestic, agricultural, aquatic and livestock use.

TABLE 2.2 **DEQ** WOD Water Classifications

NL **a No** Limit Set by Wyoming Department of Envirormental Quality, Water Quality Division **(WQD)**

NN = Not Measured

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Classifications in **pH,** non-hazardous and potentially hazardous columns are based on the highest classification that the water quality data fits. The highest classification is domestic followed by \bullet agriculture, fish/aquatic and livestock.

 $\pm\pm$ Fish/aquatic standards vary depending on water hardness. As Highland waters are very hard, the standards for hard water are shown.

*** Highland reservoir exceeds the WQD selenium standards for all recognized uses other than industrial and the uranium standard for fish and other aquatic life due to naturally occurring mineralization in the reservoir walts.

Water at the four TDSS background wells met the Wyoming Standards for livestock and for fish/aquatic use in 1997. Half met the domestic use standards.

The 1997 water quality results from the **POC** wells also came close to meeting the Wyoming Standards for livestock use. All the data from **POC** Wells 125 and 176 met the standards. Well 177 was dry but in 1996 met the livestock standards. This leaves **POC** well 175, which exceeded the Wyoming livestock standard for pH, Total Dissolved Solids (TDS), sulfate and Ra 226+228.

POC Well 175 produces water slightly below the WQD livestock pH standard. Once the water is exposed to the atmosphere, as in the evaporation pond, the pH increases to well within the pH standard. The water at Well 175 exceeds the Wyoming livestock standards for TDS and sulfate. At Well 180 in the mine backfill just a short distance west (and down dip) of Well 175 in the direction of Highland Reservoir, the water met the WQD TDS and sulfate livestock standards until the well went dry in 1994. Highland Reservoir also meets these standards. The Ra 226 and Ra 228 concentrations at Well 175 meet the EPA proposed public drinking water supply standards. Well 175 is within the area that will be deeded to the state or federal government for perpetual monitoring.

In summary, with respect to the past and current uses of ground water by non-uranium mine users within a mile of the tailings basin, uses which have been limited to livestock water, the tailings impacts have not made the water at **POC** wells 125, 176 and 177 unsuitable. Well 175 exceeds the TDS, sulfate and radium 226 + 228 standards. However, this location is within the area to be deeded to government ownership and will be unavailable to public or private use. West of Well 175 lies the mine backfill, which is an impractical source of ground water given the low well productivity and the difficulty in completing a well. West of the backfill lies Highland Reservoir which meets all the Wyoming livestock standards except for selenium. The selenium is not caused by the tailings seepage as the **POC** wells are free of this element. While the selenium in the reservoir exceeds the state standard it is not harmful to cattle. The 1978 Water Quality Criteria document of California states: "In water, 0.4 to 0.5 mg/I of selenium is believed to be non-toxic to cattle."

2.3.2 Evaluation of Health and Environmental Hazards

This section assesses the potential health and environmental hazards associated with seepage from the tailings basin. It is concluded that the potential for human exposure is remote and that the seepage does not represent a substantial present or future threat to human health, to the environment or to structures. This conclusion is based on site-specific conditions and does not rely on any changes in the water quality standards.

Even though human exposure to seepage is considered very unlikely, pathways of remotely possible exposure are considered. Safe concentrations of hazardous constituents are identified based on toxicology data and exposures conservatively projected. Standards based on environmental and other considerations are also discussed. Based on these considerations and application of the NRC **ACL** logic ("Technical Position of Alternate Concentration Limits for Uranium Mills", January 1996), health and environmental limits (HELs) are proposed for Highland, see Table 2.6.

Points of possible exposure are identified based on the flow regime at the site. While several possible exposure points are identified, the most likely point of exposures is the mine reclamation lake (Highland Reservoir). The observations drawn here are based on the

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hydrological characteristics of the Highland site and observation of the terrain, meteorology and culture gained during the extensive hydrology, water quality and mitigation studies.

2.3.2.1 Potentially Exposed Populations

Three populations have the unlikely possibility of exposure to tailings seepage at Highland. These are the human population, the environmental population (flora and fauna) and the population of physical structures placed by humans. Each is discussed below in terms of present and future exposure and associated risks to life and property.

2.3.2.1.1 Human Exposure

Current human exposure is non-existent since the Highland site is remote with no nearby habitations. There is no permanent human population at the site and the nearest residence is a ranch located two miles northwest (up gradient). The nearest population centers, with a combined population of about 8,000, are located 25 miles southeast and southwest. Neither of these population centers uses ground or surface water that could be affected by seepage moving from the tailings. There is no current impact to ground water or surface water quality that reaches the limits of the Highland site. Because of the large distances separating existing populations from the waste disposal area, there is no potential for current impacts.

There is little potential that the current very low population density in the vicinity of the site will change in the near or even the distant future. Consideration of the physical conditions and geographic location of the area make this the most plausible prediction . It is notable that during the twenty-six years since uranium mining began no residences were established near Highland.

The reclamation lake and more productive deep aquifers below the TDSh provide the most accessible water sources should water supplies ever be developed near Highland. The deeper aquifers are used at present for potable and industrial water by insitu uranium mining at Highland. It can be concluded that ground water obtained from the TDSS is an unlikely water supply option compared to the reclamation lake and the deeper aquifers.

Future land use at the site is not predicted to change from the current uses except that the reclamation lake has the potential for limited recreational use. It is unlikely that potable water will be provided for a recreational use area. Most likely is either the development of a limited use recreation area with no water development as part of the plan, or no formal development of the area. In either of these cases water used at the site for the occasional recreation use would either be brought in or come from the lake. Under all recreation use scenarios, the potential for human exposure to ground water impacted by seepage is essentially zero.

Although development of ground water through wells completed in the backfill is theoretically possible, such uses are improbable give the low permeability of the backfill material. Even if tailings seepage were precluded from entering the backfill, the current quality water would be encountered. This quality exists because rock containing low grade uranium bearing materials was used to backfill the pits. The quality is unrelated to tailings seepage.

The TDSS contains insufficient quantities of water to be used for irrigation water, primarily because of the formations limited transmissivity. Given the close proximity of the lake and better quality water in sandstones under the TDSS, it is considered unlikely that wells will be completed in the TDSS to obtain a supply of livestock water.

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2.3.2.1.2 Potential Environmental Exposure

The current environmental exposure is low. Ground water, impacted by tailings seepage or not, is not readily accessible to wildlife. Contaminants from seepage in the ground water are slowly moving to the mine backfill. The attenuation of the PHCs by the mine backfill, the limited quantities of seepage that will reach the lake relative to inflow from other sources and the lack of perennial streams in the area indicate that potential exposures to aquatic biota are negligible. Endangered or threatened species other than golden eagles are not known to exist in the area. It is not expected that seepage from the tailings basin area would have an adverse effect on such species should they exist. The ground water is sufficiently deep in the geologic/soil profile that it will not reach the root zone of plants.

Future conditions in terms of potential environmental exposure are not expected to be significantly different from current conditions. Highland Reservoir is the only surface water body that may be impacted by tailings seepage now or in the future. The reservoir water quality meets all Wyoming standards for domestic, livestock, agriculture and aquatic use for PHCs except uranium (for aquatic use) and selenium (see Table 2.2). The uranium and selenium concentration at the reservoir are not caused by tailings seepage. This is discussed at Section 2.3.2.5.4. Based on meeting the Wyoming standards for most PHCs and the source of the uranium and selenium concentrations, the tailings seepage is not posing a significant risk to humans, livestock, wildlife or other biota that might consume water from Highland Reservoir.

2.3.2.1.3 Physical Structures

There are no physical structures at or near the site that could be exposed to ground water constituents derived from the tailings basin area. No such structures are anticipated in the future.

2.3.2.2 Health and Environmental Levels

The NRC Staff Technical Position "Alternate Concentration Limits for Title II Uranium Mills" requires quantification of the permissible levels of PHCs in terms of health effects and environmental protection. In the following sections, possible although highly unlikely human exposure pathways for the site are described, appropriate standards for water at the site are identified, and health and environmental limits (HELs) are recommended for the Points of Exposure (POEs).

2.3.2.2.1 Human Exposure Pathways

The least unlikely human exposure pathway to ground water is the drinking water route. Dermal exposure could occur through recreational activities or use of lake water or ground water for domestic purposes such as bathing and washing clothes. Such exposures to the seepage water are very unlikely and the levels of hazardous constituents in the ground water are not high enough to cause adverse effects through dermal exposure. According to the EPA, dermal uptake of radionuclides and metals is generally not an important route of uptake (EPA RAGS, 1989).

Exposure via plant uptake is improbable since ground water is well below the root zone and the limited productivity of the TDSS and mine backfill preclude practical use of the water for large scale irrigation. Although livestock exposure could occur were wells developed, the concentrations of hazardous constituents are not high enough to enter the human food chain

through this mechanism. The water at the **POC** wells generally meets Wyoming livestock standards. As stated previously, the most likely source of livestock water is the reclamation lake since it is readily available and negates the need to expend the money to drill a well. However, as discussed earlier, the PHCs in the lake that exceed the GPLs are due to the characteristics of the lake and are not due to seepage from the Highland tailings basin.

2.3.2.2.2 Health Effects

Human health effects due to exposure to the PHCs that occur in the tailings seepage were evaluated for long term, or chronic exposures. (Such exposures now and in the future are highly unlikely considering the remote Highland location.) Short term exposure, while very unlikely, is more likely than long term exposure. Since it is improbable that residences will be established in the areas of highest contamination, the most logical type of exposure to expect is the one time or infrequent use of ground water as a source of drinking water. Although it seems more likely that water from the lake would be used because of convenience, it is remotely possible that someone might occasionally remove water from a well impacted by seepage for drinking. Continued use would not be expected for all the reasons given earlier and because the water tastes brackish.

The toxicology data of the constituents for which ACLs are being sought are examined in Table 2.4 and summarized in Table 2.5. A human health risk assessment is found in Appendix 6.

2.3.2.2.3 Health and Environmental Standards

All the **POC** wells meet Wyoming livestock standards with the exception of pH, TDS, sulfate and Ra226+228 at Well 175. This well is within the area to be deeded to the state or federal government for perpetual monitoring. The selected Health and Environmental Limits (HELs) for the Highland site are summarized in Table 2.5 and are based on health criteria.

2.3.2.3 Possible Points of Exposure

The possible Points of Exposure that must be examined include the following:

Ground water Surface Water East of Tailings Dam Surface Water South of Mine Site Highland Reservoir

These are examined below.

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2.3.2.3.1 Ground Water

On December 29, 1988, the NRC selected four **POC** wells (Amendment No. 27) from all the wells for which data were presented by Exxon . These four **POC** wells lie to the north, south, east and west of the center of the ponded water once held within the tailings basin. This pond created the seepage mound below the basin that has now largely dissipated. All four wells are within the area Exxon has proposed to be deeded to the state or federal government for perpetual monitoring.

The next table lists the **POC** wells and the proposed POE wells.

Table 2.3 Proposed POEs

The TDSS is dry a short distance east of 125 so there is no ground or surface water POE on the east side of the tailings basin. The POE wells proposed are the closest downgradient wells with respect to **POC** wells 175, 176 and 177. Each proposed POE is close to the boundary of the area that Exxon has proposed be deeded to the state or federal government for perpetual monitoring.

2.3.2.3.2 Surface Water East of Tailings Dam

Prior to mining and milling, an unnamed tributary of the North Fork of Box Creek ran from west to east through the area that is now the tailings basin. It was this tributary that was dammed to create the tailings basin. West of the basin the drainage has been filled with mine overburden. In the area between the overburden and the tailings dam the tributary has been filled with tailings. The drainage still exists east of the tailings dam. Therefore, this unnamed tributary no longer runs through the area west of the tailings basin dam.

During milling operations tailings seepage came to the surface downstream (east) of the dam. Three sample points were monitored with the data reported in the semi-annual reports to the NRC. The three points were #12 - Lower Tailings Dam Seepage Return Pump, #13 - Outside Fence 100 Feet below #12, and #14 - End of Seepage Flow.

The seepage to the surface ended within three years after mill operations closed. Therefore, there is no exposure to seepage components in surface waters east of the dam. NRC approved discontinuing further monitoring of surface water east of the dam with Amendment No. 28 to the license. This amendment, along with Amendment No. 27, established the current ground water monitoring program. Section 5 of Appendix 3, "Highland Tailings Basin Ground Water Study" indicates seepage will not return to the unnamed tributary in the future. See Subsection 5.4 and Figure 12 of the study.

2.3.2.3.3 Surface Water South of Tailings Basin

South of Highland lies the North Fork of Box Creek. This is an ephemeral drainage - water only runs during heavy storms and heavy snow melt. Surface water may exist at various times of the year in a man-made reservoir. This is Reservoir 2A, created by the mine operation. It was monitored with the results reported to the NRC in semi-annual reports until license Amendment No. 14 when the NRC authorized discontinuing monitoring.

An examination of Figure 1 of the 1998 EPRCO report in Appendix 3 shows that the current ground water flow direction from the tailings basin does not reach the North Fork of Box Creek. Ground water flow moves from the creek towards the mine backfill and Highland Reservoir. Therefore, tailings seepage has no impact on the creek.

When Highland Reservoir is full, the 1998 EPRCO report in Appendix 3 (see Subsection 5.4 and Figure 12 of report) concludes "in general, once water levels stabilize, ground water will flow from west to east, with perturbations to this flow regime in the vicinity of the Highland Reservoir and mine backfill. The rate of flow is greatest to the northwest of the Reservoir (approximately **.15** ft/day), and slowest to the northeast of the Reservoir (approximately .05 ft./day). In the vicinity of the tailings basin, the ground water flows from northwest to the southeast at a rate of about .03,ft/day, but changes to an easterly flow direction at the eastern edge of the tailing basin. In addition to this change in flow direction, the water table dips below the TDSS and lies within the TDSh in the southeast portion of the tailings basin. As a result, it appears that the portion of the unnamed tributary of the North Fork of the Box Creek that lies to the east of the tailings dam, and the North Fork of the Box Creek that lies to the south of the tailings basin, will not intercept ground water migrating from beneath the basin." (Underlining added.)

2.3.2.3.4 Highland Reservoir

Tailings seepage currently moves towards Highland Reservoir. The seepage passes through mine backfill before reaching the surface water. This situation will reverse when the reservoir is full.

Highland Reservoir is now monitored for the same constituents as are monitored to meet NRC license requirements. The Total Dissolved Solids, sulfate and chloride concentrations are far below those seen at the POC and POE wells. This clearly indicates the tailings seepage is only a minor portion of the water in the reservoir.

The reservoir uranium concentration is orders of magnitude higher than at any POC or POE well. Given the low component of seepage in the water and the much lower uranium concentration at the wells, an explanation other than seepage is needed for this uranium concentration. The explanation is obvious. The bottom and sides of the reservoir include unmined uranium mineralization. These provide the source of the uranium in the surface water. The uranium is not the result of tailings basin seepage. Therefore, the GPL is not applicable as the limit only applies to PHCs derived from byproduct material whereas the uranium in Highland Reservoir derives from unmined mineralization. The uranium concentration in the reservoir meets the Wyoming potable, livestock and irrigation standards. Therefore, this is not a significant risk factor.

Ra 226 is measured in the Reservoir. The concentrations are higher than the POC or POE wells. The explanation is the same as for uranium, so the Ra 226 results are not the result of tailings seepage. A few measurements have been made of the Ra228 concentration. These were less than the detection limit. The Ra 226 + 228 GPL is not applicable to Highland Reservoir for the reasons given above. However, the data is close to the GPL. The average Ra 226 + 228 concentration since 1996 where Ra228 measurement began is <5.4 pCi/I (4.4 pCi/I Ra 226 plus <1.0 pCi/I Ra 228). It is worth emphasizing that Ra 228 causes Well 175 to exceed the Ra 226 + 228 limit while Ra 226 has sometimes caused Highland Reservoir to exceed the limit. The isotopic "fingerprinting" indicates the Ra 226 and Ra 228 sources for Well 175 and Highland Reservoir are different.

Nickel measurements are made but none has been detected in Highland Reservoir.

Selenium is found above the GPL. Selenium is below the detection limit at the POC and POE wells and is far below the GPL. Once again, the explanation for the selenium in the reservoir is unmined mineralization and not tailings seepage. The GPL is, therefore, not applicable to

Highland Reservoir. The water quality of Highland Reservoir is under review with the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality.

In summary, there is no exposure to any PHC above a GPL in Highland Reservoir that derives from tailings basin seepage. Any exposure that exists derives from naturally occurring materials at the reservoir.

TABLE 2.4

HAZARDOUS CONSTITUENT HEALTH EFFECTS DISCUSSION

Constituent Constituent Const

Nickel (Ni)

Radium (RA226/228)

Uranium (UNAT)

EPA promulgated a maximum contaminant level of 0.1 mg/I under the Safe Drinking Water Act on July 17, 1992. This standard applies to public water supplies. The standard is set to be below, with an adequate margin of safety, the concentration below which no adverse health affects are observed. Nickel is not considered a carcinogen via ingestion. [57 FR 31776-31849]. Wyoming has established agricultural (irrigation) and fish/aquatic standards for nickel of 0.2 and 0.4 mg/I, respectively.

In 1991 EPA proposed radium 226 and radium 228 Maximum Contaminant Limits (MCLs) for public water supplies of 20 pCi/I (56 FR33050-33127). These limits were based on EPA policy for regulating carcinogens in drinking water to a lifetime individual risk target of 1 in 10,000 to 1 in 1,000,000. Therefore, this standard is protective of human health and the environment to a lifetime risk level not exceeding 1 in 10,000.

In 1991 EPA proposed a uranium Maximum Contaminant Limit (MCL) for public water supplies of 20 mg/I (30 pCi/I) (56 FR 33050-33127). This limit was based on EPA policy for regulating carcinogens in drinking water to a lifetime individual risk target of 1 in 10,000 to 1 in 1,000,000. Therefore, this standard is protective of human health and the environment to a lifetime risk level not exceeding **1** in 10,000.

TABLE 2.5

MAXIMUM CONTAMINANT LIMITS (MCLs)

Radium (Ra228) (Proposed) 20 Radium (Ra226+228) (Derived) 20* Uranium (UNAT) (Proposed) 30

*Using 20 pCi/I for Ra226 + 228 is the most conservative approach whereas 40 pCi/I would be the least conservative. Using 20 pCi/I provides assurance that neither Ra226 nor Ra228 will exceed the respective MCL.

2.3.3 Practical Possibility of Using Ground Water

Obviously no human exposure would occur unless someone chose to develop a well in the) TDSS or chose to use an existing TDSS well in the area impacted by tailings seepage. After the tailings area is transferred to government ownership, the areas near Wells 178, 179, 181 and 183 could potentially be developed. Three of these four TDSS wells lie within the 1998 seepage front (based on chloride concentration) but outside of the zone proposed for government ownership. Well 183 is outside the 1996 seepage front. Of these, only.the ground water at Well 178 does not meet the current GPLs due to UNAT. UNAT at Well 178 is covered in the risk assessment (Appendix 6).

The current productivity of Well 178 of about 115 gallons per day is not adequate to supply the needs of a single home. Section 1.0 of Chapter III of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality Rules and Regulations require a sewage treatment capacity of at least 350 gallons per day for a single family residence. This does not allow for other water uses that do not discharge to the sewer such as landscape watering. The Well 178 limited productivity is declining further as the water level falls in the TDSS.

Under extraordinary circumstances a water well with a production rate as low as Well 178 might be employed, even with the current water quality. However, much better and much more productive aquifers can be reached less than 100 feet deeper. Therefore, the short term availability of a very limited supply of water at Well 178 that does not meet the GPL is not a potential hazard. When Highland reservoir is full, the water level at this well will return with a saturated thickness of about 13 feet so the well will then be productive. However, the return of the better quality groundwater from the northwest should eventually return the water quality of Well 178 to near baseline conditions.

Someone might attempt in the future to complete a well in the mine backfill. However, wells completed in the mine backfill produce very little water. Typically, no more than 200 gallons can be produced before these wells run dry. Therefore, the mine backfill is not an aquifer. The mine backfill material is unconsolidated. This makes completing a well difficult, as the drilled holes can collapse before the well casing can be placed in the hole, as happened with Well 173 (see Exxon, December 29, 1988, license amendment application). Highland Reservoir and wells located entirely off the mine backfill and drilled into deeper strata would be much more logical sources of water.

2.3.4 Proposed Health and Environment Limits (HELs)

Health and Environmental Limits (HELs) for the **ACL** application are proposed in the table below:

These values are taken from the MCLs on Table 2.5.

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2.3.5 Documentation of Attenuation Factors

The proposed Highland attenuation factors are based on data obtained from on site } measurements and monitoring records of the water quality at the **POC** and POE wells. This comparison between wells provides stronger evidence of attenuation than calculations based on laboratory data for seepage interacting with TDSS material. This comparison is also very site specific.

POEs have been discussed by Exxon and the NRC before but have not been officially recognized specifically for Highland. Exxon proposes a POE of Highland Reservoir for Well 175. The reservoir is less than 4000 feet from the Well 175 and is close to the edge of the area proposed for transfer to government ownership for long term monitoring. The reservoir is in the current approximate down gradient direction from Well 175. No POE exists east of Well 125 as the TDSS is unsaturated in this direction a short distance from Well 125. Therefore, no POE is proposed for Well 125. This in effect means health and environmental limits are not applicable to Well 125. Well 178 is 450 feet southeast of Well 177 and is close to the edge of the area proposed for transfer to government ownership.

The PHC concentrations at the above POEs are compared to the concentrations at the respective **POC** wells in Table 2.7 on the next page. From this comparison attenuation factors can be derived as presented in the table. These are simple ratios of the **POC** concentrations divided by the POE concentrations to yield attenuation factors. In cases where the ratio is less than one, no attenuation is claimed between the POC and the POE.

Table 2.7 Attenuation Factors

2.3.6 Derived Health and Environment Limits (DHELs)

Applying the above described attenuation factors to the HELs yields a set of Derived Health and Environment Limits (DHELs) that should not be exceeded at the POCs. These are presented in Table 2.8 on the next page. Water quality at the POCs at the DHEL concentrations would not result in a substantial present or potential hazard to human health or the environment at the POEs. No DHEL applies east of the tailings basin (east of Well 125) because there is no POE in that direction (see Section 2.3.2.3.1).

2.3.6.1 Basis for Attenuation Factors

Attenuation factors have been calculated for uranium south of the tailings basin and for nickel and Ra 226 + 228 west of the basin. The calculated values are based on simple ratios of the current concentrations at the POCs and the POEs. These ratios essentially assume no significant changes over time in the relative **POC** and POE concentrations before Highland Reservoir is full. All groundwater concentrations should begin to fall around the tailings basin after that time as better quality water moves into the area and reducing conditions are restored.

There is a rational basis for forecasting no significant change in ground water quality around the tailings basin before the reservoir is full and the ground water quality begins to improve. EPRCO completed a model of the tailings basin in 1982 (EPRCO 1982) that has been a relatively good predictor of current concentrations. Conclusions can be drawn from that report, supported by the monitoring data.

First, the EPRCO Seepage Study model (EPRCO, 1982) indicated solute movements would nearly cease in the southerly direction by 1992. Therefore, the latest uranium concentrations at Wells 177 and 178 represent long term concentrations. This is supported by the current ground water flow direction (Figure 1 of Appendix 3) and predicted long term flow direction (Figure 12 of Appendix 3) and years of monitoring Wells 177 and 178.

Second, the 1982 EPRCO study indicates finite limits to the movement of the PHCs. The study found radium is nearly immobile with a Relative Velocity (defined term in study) of 0.011 versus 1.0 for sulfate and calcium. Highland Reservoir will be full and the ground water flow will be reversed before tailing basin Ra 228, the principal tailings basin radium isotope in solution, can

reach Highland Reservoir. While Ni is not attenuated by the TDSS in an acidic environment (other than by simple dilution), Ni solubility is pH dependent. Thus, it only travels as far as the low pH front. The EPRCO Seepage study found a relative velocity of the pH front of 0.5. Figure 57 of the EPRCO Seepage Study indicates the pH front would be nearly stagnant by 1992. This is born out by the monitoring date. The pH has not declined below 5.9 at Well 175 by 1998 although the pH front had reached the well by 1988 as predicted by EPRCO. The pH front was just beginning to impact Well 180 when it went dry in 1994. This well is only 300 feet west of Well 175. The reservoir is another 1700 feet further away

The model predicts a declining rate of advance for the pH front as the volume of low pH liquid declines behind the seepage front and the perimeter of the front grows. The mass of alkaline **TDSS** and mine backfill between Well 175 and Highland Reservoir is too great for the remaining seepage volume to overcome. A simple acknowledgement of the much larger volume of seepage from 1972 to date that barely pushed the pH front to Well 180 versus the much smaller remaining volume plus the long distance to Highland Reservoir makes this point very strongly. Tailings seepage is only a modest contributor to the Highland Reservoir inflow, a fact attested to by the reservoir **TDS** and S04 concentrations versus the concentrations at TDSS wells around the tailings basin.

Highland Reservoir currently contains 2.6 billion gallons of pH 8 water versus 294 million gallons within the entire TDSS chloride front in 1996 capable of draining to the reservoir (Appendix 3). Most of the 294 million gallons has a neutral pH and no measurable Ni. Therefore, the remaining low pH liquid within the pH front has insufficient mass to significantly affect the reservoir, thereby preventing the appearance of Ni in the lake.

While the Ni concentration in Highland Reservoir will not change, neither will that of Well 175 in the near future. The pH front has reached this Well, the Ni concentration matches that of both the tailings fluid and the EPRCO prediction for the Ni concentration behind the pH front. The concentration will only begin to decline when Highland Reservoir is full and alkaline water begins to move back towards Well 175.

EPRCO found a Relative Velocity for uranium in the TDSS of 0.068. Therefore, its rate of movement is only 7% of the rate for the conservative ion front. With the southerly seepage movement nearly stopped, the uranium front movement in that direction is essentially zero.

Table 2.8 DERIVED HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL LIMITS FOR POINTS OF COMPLIANCE

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3. CORRECTIVE ACTION ASSESSMENT

3.1 Previous Corrective Action

Before Criterion 5 of Appendix A to 10 CFR Part 40 became effective in 1987, the only requirement to control tailings seepage at Highland was to return seepage to the basin that came to the surface. The facility had been designed and licensed with seepage and some degradation of the uppermost acquifer expected. Nevertheless, Exxon took steps before 1987 to reduce that seepage.

During the 1970s, Exxon operated a tailings water evaporation system that reduced the tailings liquid volume by upwards of 100 million gallons. This reduced the hydrostatic head in the tailings basin and slowed seepage. From the later 1970s to 1984 when mill operations ceased, Exxon recycled tailings liquid to the mill. This reduced fresh-water use by about 500 million gallons, reduced sulfuric acid use and recovered about ten thousand pounds of uranium. Using less fresh water reduced the hydrostatic head in the tailings basin and reduced seepage. Less sulfuric acid use meant less sulfate entering ground water and there was less migration of the low pH front into the uppermost aquifer. The uranium recovery reduced potential uranium migration into the uppermost aquifer.

From the mid 1970s until mill operation ceased, Exxon operated a uranium recovery system at the tailings basin that reduced the mass of uranium available to seepage by over 150 thousand pounds. From 1984 until 1988 Exxon operated a spray system and evaporation lagoons to rapidly dry out the tailings basin in preparation for reclamation. The spray system and lagoons rapidly reduced the hydrostatic head in the tailings basin and reduced seepage. This impact can be seen in the graphs of the static water elevations at the monitor wells (see Appendix 4). Many water levels peaked around 1984 and then began a rapid decline.

3.2 Source Decommissioning and Reclamation

Following closure of the Highland mill in 1984 interim stabilization began. As the liquid level was reduced in the tailings basin, tailings recontouring was performed. Once tailings were at the necessary subgrade elevation for reclamation, a thin lift of clayey fill was placed to prevent wind migration of tailings. By 1989 the pond had evaporated and most of the tailings were covered with soil. Recovery of wind blown tailings was completed that year. During the spring, summer and early fall of 1989, the tailings reclamation work proceeded. Dam and tailings recontouring were completed. All the tailings were covered with a low permeability radon barrier consisting of compacted clayey soil. Once the radon barrier was placed, topsoil was placed and planted with winter wheat. Only a 20-acre area was not topsoiled. This was the area in the middle of the-basin where settlement continued and the seepage mitigation pond is located. This area has a two-foot layer of radon barrier. In 1990 the topsoiled areas were planted with permanent vegetation.

The radon barrier exercises effective control over infiltration of rainfall and snow melt into the tailings. The vegetation further reduces infiltration by evapotranspiration. Between the radon barrier and the vegetation, the water infiltration has been reduced to about three gallons per minute for the entire tailings basin - equivalent to about one half inch per year. Once tailings settlement is 90% complete and tailings seepage recovery ends, the reclamation of the 20-acre area in the tailings can be completed.

The reclaimed basin, with the low permeability clayey cover, is the Base Case for seepage mitigation. Benefits of the Base Case (source decommissioning and reclamation) include no longer recharging the tailings from an active mill operation, reduced seepage from eliminating the surface impoundment and minimization of long term seepage by restricting recharge.

3.3 Corrective Action Program

License Amendment No. 27 for the Highland mill and tailings basin, dated February 8, 1989, required implementation of a Corrective Action Program (CAP) to meet the GPLs at the POCs around the Highland tailings basin. Exxon submitted a CAP for NRC approval on May 1, 1989. The program included reducing future infiltration by surface reclamation and allowing natural processes to mitigate the ground water impacts to achieve the GPLs. WWL 1989 showed no practicable technology could achieve the license standards sooner than could be achieved by natural processes. Exxon proposed ACLs (Exxon 1989) that were protective of human health and the environment at the potential POEs. After reviewing this submittal, the NRC asked Exxon to submit a revised CAP involving selective pumping of wells with elevated levels of PHCs to improve future ground water quality.

On August 15, 1989 Exxon submitted a revised CAP to the NRC. The objective of this CAP was to remove PHCs from ground water in order to reduce concentrations to levels As Low As Reasonably Achievable (ALARA).

The CAP proposed and approved by NRC on August 18, 1989 in License Amendment No. 32, consisted of pumping five existing wells completed in the TDSS in the area of highest PHC concentrations. This is called the finger area and lies south and west of the tailings basin. The CAP included disposal of the recovered water in an evaporation pond built on top of the radon barrier. The specific wells to be pumped included Wells 114, 117, 175, 177 and 178.

3.4 Results of Correction Action Program

Exxon began operating the NRC approved CAP in November of 1989. Annual progress reports have been submitted each January since then. The system originally included an evaporation pond and five recovery wells south and west of the tailings. NRC approved discontinuing pumping from Well 114 in 1990 since the well was unproductive. The system has recovered 15.0 million gallons through 1997. This recovered ground water contained about 300 metric tons of dissolved solids including 54 kilograms of non-radioactive, potentially hazardous constituents and 1.3 millicurie of radioactive constituents. About seventy percent of the radioactive material has been uranium of which about 1.2 kilograms has been recovered.

The PHCs are being precipitated with the non-hazardous dissolved solids that are deposited at the bottom of the evaporation pond. For example, the water pumped to the evaporation pond through September 1996 contained about 21 kilograms of salts (primarily sodium and calcium sulfates), 3 grams of the non-radioactive PHCs, 0.08 grams of uranium and 25 nanocuries of other radionuclides per square meter of evaporation pond surface. The uranium and radium 226 concentrations in the total dissolved solids in the water are about three and one picocurie per gram of solid (pCi/g) , respectively. The evaporites, containing these concentrations of uranium and radium 226, will be buried under at least 1.5 feet of radon barrier and a half foot of

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topsoil when the reclamation of the evaporation pond area is completed. The evaporites will make no distinguishable contribution to the tailings basin radon flux.

The ground water volumes recovered from the recovery wells along with the June 1998 average recovery rates are presented in Table 3.1. The TDSS saturated thicknesses at the recovery wells in 1998 are also provided.

Table 3.1 TDSS Ground Water Recovery

Ground water recovery was suspended in 1990 at Well 114 due to poor productivity.

Graphs of the water levels at the TDSS wells in Appendix 4 show steep declines in water levels near the tailings basin since mill operations ended in 1984. The decline has tapered off at many of the wells in the past several years. Ground water recovery rates have declined as the ground water levels have fallen. The water production from Wells 117 and 175 was restricted until 1994 to maintain steady pumping rates. Production is now at the maximum capacity of the wells to make up for the loss of productive capacity at Wells 177 and 178. However, Well 117 now has very little productivity. The water quality data is provided in Appendix 1 from 1988 to the present. These show the decline in most of the PHCs.

3.5 Feasibility of Alternative Correction Actions from WWL, May 1989

As required by Appendix A of 10 CFR Part 40, Exxon submitted a CAP in 1989 (Exxon, 1989). The Program'included reducing future seepage from the tailings basin by surface reclamation and allowing natural processes to mitigate the ground water impacts to achieve the NRC Ground Water Protection Limits (GPLs). This is the Base Case and is essentially the same plan as in the Highland Environmental Impact Statement. WWL 1989 included a detailed review of potential corrective actions. This review, summarized in Section 4.0, Table 4.1, Table 4.2, and Appendix B (all from WWL, 1989) concluded that no practicable technology could achieve the license limits sooner than could be achieved by surface reclamation and natural processes. Exxon proposed Alternative Concentration Limits (ACLs) that were protective of human health and the environment that were As Low As Reasonably Achievable (ALARA) using practicable technology.

The possible corrective actions included a slurry trench to confine the remaining liquid beneath the tailings basin, a water purge to flush the seepage more quickly into the mine backfill and various combinations of pumping out and disposing of seepage, reinjecting treated seepage and injecting clean water from various sources - - with and without chemical reductant and acid neutralizers. In a letter dated July 3, 1989, NRC denied approval of the proposed ACLs and

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time." NRC stated, "Following operation of your corrective action program and based upon the monitoring gained during its operation, an alternate concentration limit proposal would be appropriate."

In response to the NRC recommendation, Exxon proposed pumping from wells in the area of the highest PHC concentrations and disposing of the water in an evaporation pond. NRC approved this plan and deferred approving ACLs pending a demonstration through pumping of what the ALARA concentrations would be. This is the plan Exxon has been executing since 1989.

3.6 Updated and Expanded Review of Alternative Corrective Actions

The review of the potential corrective action plans is updated and expanded in Appendix 7. This updated review demonstrates the high costs and low benefits of additional mitigation.

3.7 Correction Action Cost Estimates (from WWL, May 1989)

Table 4.3 and Appendix B (WWL, 1989) include cost estimates of the corrective action alternatives. The cost estimates range from hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars without providing significant benefits to human health or the environment over completing surface reclamation and natural mitigation. Besides financial costs, all the options had potential human costs due to potential industrial accidents performing the work and potential highway accidents in getting to the remote Highland site. Appendix 7 yields essentially the same conclusions.

3.8 Actual Correction Action Costs

The estimated financial cost of operating the current CAP was reported in the latest reclamation surety estimate submitted to NRC by Exxon on August 3, 1998. The cost is about fifty thousand dollars per year over the cost of ground water monitoring. To date there have been no accidents or injuries associated with the CAP.

3.9 Expected Corrective Action Benefits (from WWL May, 1989)

Section 4.0 - Corrective Action Alternatives (WWL, 1989) addressed alternatives and benefits. It concluded natural mitigation after completing the surface reclamation to reduce future infiltration into the tailings was the best approach. The following quotation summarizes the view of WWL in 1989.

"The rejected alternatives suffered from a common problem. In the short term they could not achieve the current NRC standards [NRC ground water protection limits]. Pumping out the seepage would reduce the chance that seepage might be used by anyone but this chance is already negligible [due to demographics, palatability, economics and better alternative supplies]. In the very long term, none of the alternatives proved superior to letting the seepage flow into the [mine] backfill area where geochemical attenuation of the hazardous constituents will occur, while allowing the ground water to return to its pre-mining levels, creating a reducing environment. To improve this natural mitigation during the next 100 years would require continuous injection of higher quality water for 100 years [consuming a very large volume of good water]."

Appendix 7 indicates the substantially higher costs of additional mitigation measurements, such as more pumping, a reactive barrier or ground water injection and disposal, would yield very little benefit.

3.10 Actual Benefits of Corrective Action Program

This program has removed 15.8 million gallons of water from the uppermost aquifer through 1997. The water pumping has removed about 338 metric tons of dissolved solids from the TDSS including 54 kilograms of non-radioactive, potentially hazardous constituents and 1.3 millicurie of radioactive constituents. About seventy percent of the radioactive material has been uranium of which about 1.2 kilogram has been recovered. During the operation of the CAP the volume of liquid that can be drained from within the chloride front has declined by over 50%. The volume in the finger area where the PHC concentration was highest in 1989 has also declined by 50%.

More importantly, there has been a substantial reduction in the number of GPLs exceeded at the **POC** wells. The table below compares the PHCs exceeded by each POE well in 1988 versus the 1998 results.

Table 3.2 GPL Exceedances

In summary, there were twenty GPLs being exceeded (counting each GPL exceeded at each well) versus only four in the most recent data.

3.11. As Low As Reasonably Achievable by Recovery System Demonstration

In eight years of operation the CAP has removed 15.8 million gallons from the area south and west of the tailings basin. This is about twenty percent of the 80 million gallons in that area in 1989 (at 0.1 specific yield) capable of draining. There is about 40 million gallons there now. Natural mitigation since 1989 has removed three times more ground water than the ground water pumping efforts in the CAP.

Natural mitigation occurs when the ground water moves down gradient into the mine backfill. In the backfill geochemical reactions cause the pH to increase and cause both the total dissolved solids and the potentially hazardous constituent concentrations to decline as predicted in the

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1982 EPRCO study. This process has occurred over the life of the tailings basin. The concentrations of the potentially hazardous constituents will eventually reflect the water quality at Well 171 in the mine backfill. This well has not been significantly impacted by ground water from the tailings basin as the non-hazardous constituent concentrations and pH are about the same as the TDSS background wells. The only potentially hazardous constituents regularly found above the NRC ground water protection limits at Well 171 is uranium. These concentrations are due to the low grade uranium mineralization in the mine backfill and not tailings seepage. This claim is proven as the uranium concentrations at Wells 114 and 175 close to the tailings basin (and with the lowest pH values and highest TDS and nickel values) are lower than at Well 171.

3.12 Expected Timing for Natural Mitigation to Meet License Limits

Section 2.3.2 - Ground Water Quality Predictions (WWL, 1989) estimated baseline conditions would return to the TDSS after the TDSS under the tailings had drained (20 to 50 years) and Highland Reservoir had filled (100 years). Between the time that the TDSS is drained and the reservoir is full, the TDSS at the tailings basin will be unsaturated. Therefore, no ground water will exist for development.

Highland Reservoir must fill to an elevation of at least 5090 feet above sea level for any area under or immediately around the tailings basin in the TDSS to resaturate. After this occurs it may take a hundred years or more for backgrourid conditions to be restored at the **POC** wells. The water level in the TDSS under the tailings basin will be between 5105 and 5124 feet above sea level when the reservoir is full. At the higher elevation the saturated thickness at **POC** Wells 125, 175, 176 and 177 would be zero, 41, 37 and 7 feet, respectively (Figure 12 of Appendix 3). Thus, one of the four **POC** wells will remain dry after the tailings basin seepage has dissipated and the reservoir has filled. This means there will be no groundwater development potential for the TDSS to the east of the tailings basin. Only uranium exceeds the GPL south of the basin and the risk assessment (Appendix 6) indicates no significant risk at the proposed POE.

Of Wells 175 and 176, only the water at Well 175 does not meet all the current NRC limits. This well is within the smallest possible area that under federal law must be deeded to the State of Wyoming or the U.S. Department of Energy for perpetual monitoring. Highland Reservoir is the only reasonable Point of Exposure (POE) for this **POC** well.

The reservoir water quality meets the GPLs except for uranium and selenium. A comparison of the uranium and selenium concentrations versus the **POC** wells proves the reservoir concentrations are not a result of the tailings basin. The reservoir concentrations of uranium and selenium are much higher than at Wells 114 and 175 in the TDSS at the west end of the tailings basin and also much higher than the concentrations at the mine backfill wells.

Once the reservoir is full, the ground water movement in the TDSS will be from the reservoir towards the surface discharge (elevation of 5100 feet) in the North Fort of Box Creek south of the mine backfill. The ground water under the tailings basin will be nearly stagnant.

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4. PROPOSED ALTERNATE CONCENTRATION LIMITS (ACLs)

4.1 Proposed ACLs

The cadmium, chromium, lead, selenium, gross alpha and thorium-230 concentrations at the Point of Compliance (POC) wells meet the current Ground Water Protection Limits (GPLs). Therefore, no ACLs are proposed for these Potentially Hazardous Constituents (PHCs). **POC** Well 176 meets all the GPLs, so no ACLs are proposed based on this well. The GPLs were set by the NRC based on the Table 5C values in Appendix A to 10 CFR Part 40 and background quality as measured in 1988 at Well 182. ECMC did not agree with the use of only one well to establish background. However, the GPLs that could have been established based on a wider set of background wells would not of significantly changed the GPLs in the license, so ECMC did not appeal the values.

ACLs based on the other three POC wells are proposed in Table 4.1 for nickel (Ni), radium 226 + 228 (Ra 226 + 228) and natural uranium (UNAT). The proposed ACLs are based on the Derived Health and Environmental Limits (DHELs) (see Table 2.4) and ALARA values (see Table 1.2) for the **POC** wells. Each proposed ACL equals either the appropriate DHEL or ALARA concentration, whichever is lower. The concentrations at the POCs already meet the proposed ACLs as shown in the table below.

Table 4.1 Proposed Alternate Concentration Limits (ACLs)

NA means Not Applicable because there is no Point of Exposure east of the tailings basin.

The Well 125 uranium ACL is well below the Wyoming Chapter III ground water standards for potable, agricultural, livestock and aquatic use. East of the tailings basin the TDSS lies above the predicted long-term ground water elevation, so the TDSS at Well 125 will not be an aquifer in the future. The **ACL** does not pose a substantial present or potential hazard to human health or the environment.

The Well 175 nickel ACL, in conjunction with the demonstrated attenuation factors, protects Highland Reservoir from detectable concentrations of nickel (0.02 mg/I) and from exceeding the EPA MCL of 0.1 mg/I (40 CFR 141.62). The **ACL** protects the mine backfill nickel concentrations (Wells 170, 171 and 173) from exceeding the 0.1 mg/I drinking water MCL

promulgated July 17, 1992. The mine backfill is not capable of producing a significant amount of water from a well. Well 175 itself is within the minimum required area that must be deeded to the state or federal government with the byproduct material disposal area. Eventually, natural processes will return the ground water at this location to near background conditions after the existing ground water has drained into the mine backfill and Highland Reservoir has filled to the final elevation. The ACL does not pose a substantial present or potential hazard to human health or the environment.

The Well 175 radium 226 + 228 **ACL** protects Highland Reservoir from exceeding the EPA proposed drinking water MCLs of 20 pCi/I for radium 226 and radium 228 (56 FR 33050- 33127). The **ACL** protects the mine backfill radium 226 + 228 concentrations (Wells 170, 171 and 173) from exceeding the EPA proposed MCLs. EPA MCLs are intended to protect small and very large public water systems so provide a wide margin of safety at this very rural site.

The Well 177 uranium **ACL** protects ground water further south of the tailings basin at Well 178 from exceeding the proposed MCL. Well 177 is dry. Ground water meeting the **ACL** at this location does not pose a substantial present or potential hazard to human health or the environment. Well 177 is no longer capable of producing water due to the lack of saturated thickness in the TDSS south of the tailings basin. The bottom of the TDSS in this area lies below the predicted long-term ground water elevation (Figure 4 of Appendix 3), so the TDSS at, Wells 177 and 178 will be an aquifer after Highland Reservoir fills. The **ACL** will then be protective of the POE (Well 178).

4.2 Proposed Implementation Measures

PHCs for which ACLs are not being sought(chromium, thorium-230, etc.) have been in compliance with the GPLs for a significant period of time (see Appendix 1). In the case of the ACLs proposed, the monitoring results have been in compliance with the proposed ACLs for a significant period of time (see Table 4.1 above or Appendix 1). Therefore, **ECMC** proposes that ground water recovery as required by License Condition Numbers 33A and **33C** be terminated. **ECMC** also proposes that the ground water corrective action system be decommissioned and reclaimed in accordance with Section 5 of this report. The tailings basin reclamation could then be completed as soon as the ground settlement achieves the milestone in the license. ECMC further proposes that ground water monitoring continue for two years beyond the granting of the **ACL** license amendment. Assuming the ground water monitoring results stay within the **ACL** limits, the proposal is to then terminate ground water monitoring and decommission the monitoring wells.

The ground water data at the POCs will be considered to meet the ACLs as long as the ACLs are not exceeded. In the event an **ACL** is exceeded (an event with a 5% probability with no real change in the ground water since the ACLs equal the ALARA values that are based on the mean values plus two standard deviations), ECMC will conduct an investigation to determine if the ground water has indeed failed to meet an ACL.

Investigations will be performed following the procedure summarized below. NRC recommends this procedure when insitu uranium mine monitor well data exceeds an Upper Control Limit.

1) The data will be examined to determine if a procedural error in the field, in the laboratory, or during data management has occurred. This examination will include, but not be limited to the following:

- Review of field notes to ascertain a potential error-in sampling location or procedure.
- Verification that the laboratory work has met quality assurance requirements.
- Review of the data management work to determine if a transcription or other data handling error has occurred.

2) If a procedural error is uncovered and can be corrected (as, for example, a mistake in transcription), no further verification action will be taken, and routine monitoring will resume in accordance with the site-specific monitoring program.

3) If a lapse in laboratory quality assurance is suspected that can be corrected by reanalysis within the maximum allowed holding times of the sample portion that remains with the laboratory, the reanalysis will be performed.

4) If insufficient sample remains in the laboratory for reanalysis, if the holding time requirements cannot be met, if a lapse in field sampling procedure is suspected to have occurred, or more generally, if confirmation of the result is desired, resampling may be necessary. The decision whether or not to resample immediately or wait until the next regularly scheduled sampling will depend on the nature and level of exceedance, hydrologic conditions, and the water quality at other locations. The decision when to resample will be made in consultation with the NRC.

If the investigation described above reveals a cause for the exceedance other than the actual ground water quality, normal monitoring will continue. The results of the investigation documenting that the actual ground water quality is not the cause of exceedance will be provided verbally to the NRC within three working days and in writing within 30 days. The same notification process will be followed if the investigation described above cannot substantially rule out that the actual ground water quality is the cause. ECMC will then review with NRC what steps should be taken to correct the deviation from the ACL.

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5. DECOMMISSIONING CORRECTIVE ACTION SYSTEM

Assuming NRC approves Exxon's full request, the corrective action of continuous ground water recovery will be terminated. Once the evaporation pond is dry and tailings settlement in this area has achieved 90% consolidation, the evaporation pond will be reclaimed and the reclamation of the tailings basin will be completed in accordance with the approved reclamation plan (Condition 40 of the license). The reclamation will stabilize the evaporites in the bottom of the evaporation pond between the existing two feet of radon barrier under the evaporation pond and the additional one and a half feet of radon barrier and one half foot of topsoil to be placed as well as additional soil needed to make up for settlement. The radium-226 concentration in the evaporites is about 1 pCi/g. Therefore, the evaporites will make no significant contribution to radon emissions from the basin.

Once two successful years of post-corrective action monitoring have been collected, the monitoring and ground water recovery wells will be plugged and reclaimed according to Exxon's license commitment (Section 2.5 of Exxon Application for Amendment dated November 10, 1989).

Following a brief reclamation stabilization period, the site should be ready for termination of the specific license and transfer to government ownership under general license provisions.

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APPENDIX 1

WATER QUALITY DATA

TABLES 3A, 3B, 3C, 3E, EF, WATER QUALITY TABLES

- 3A TDSS COMPLIANCE WELLS
- 3B TDSS MONITOR WELLS
- **3C** TDSS BACKGROUND MONITOR WELLS
- 3E MINE BACKFILL MONITOR WELLS
- 3F HIGHLAND RESERVOIR

APPENDIX 5.DOC

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WELL pH **TDS** S04 C[Na N03 As Cd Cr Ni Pb Se Grs Alpha Ra226 Ra228 Ra226+228 Th230 UNAT NUMBER WELL **NAME** DATE (S.U.) *(IWgJ)* (mg/I) (mg/i) (mg/]) (mg/I) (mg/I) (mg/I) (mg/[) (mg/I) (mg/1) (mg/I) (pCi/I) (pCi/i) (pCi/I) (pCi/I) (pCi/1) (pCi/I) 177 TDI XLIII 08/22/88 6.1 4974 2080 325 **<** 0.01 **<** 0.001 0.010 **<** 0.010 0.110 **<** 0.05 **<** 0.001 3.0 1.60 2.00 3.60 1.20 43.00 09/07/88 6.1 4450 2250 308 0.40 **C** 0.001 0.016 **<** 0.010 0.120 **<** 0.05 **<** 0.001 3.6 0.80 4.30 5.10 0.50 69.00 **09/21/88** 6.3 4526 2510 290 0.12 **<** 0.001 0.013 **<** 0.010 0.150 **'** 0.05 0.001 2.9 1.00 6.50 7.50 0.50 62.00 10/18/188 **6.3** 5349 2470 338 **283** 0.15 **<** 0,001 0,011 **<** 0,010 0,140 4 **0.05 <** 0,001 2.8 1.20 **6.90 8.10** 1.00 41.00 Average 1988 6.2 4825 2328 315 283 **<** 0.17 **<** 0.001 0.012 **<** 0.010 0.130 **<** 0.05 **<** 0.001 3.1 1.15 4.92 6.07 0.80 53.75 01/11/89 6.5 4167 2800 282 283 0.75 • 0.001 0.011 **<** 0.010 **<** 0.020 **<** 0.05 0.002 4.6 1.80 5.70 7.50 0.70 64.00 04/24/89 6.4 4037 3050 460 277 0.25 **<** 0.001 0.011 **'** 0.010 **<** 0.020 **<** 0.05 **<** 0.001 4.0 1.60 2.40 4.00 1.80 20.00 07/13/89 6.4 4636 2690 320 273 0.14 **<** 0.001 0.008 • 0.010 **<** 0.020 **<** 0.05 0.003 2.0 1.80 1.20 3.00 1.40 64.00 10/20/89 6.4 4432 2650 310 **350** 0.18 **12/18/89** 6.4 4355 **2290** 310 **280** 0.44 **< 0,001** 0,015 0,040 **0,090** 4 **0.05 <** 0,001 **3.0** 1.40 1.60 3.00 1.10 47.00 Average 1989 6.4 4325 2696 336 293 0.35 **<** 0.001 0.011 **<** 0.018 4 0.038 **<** 0.05 **C** 0.002 3.4 1.65 2.72 4.37 1.25 48.80 01/18/90 6.3 3105 2400 290 274 < 0.01 **<** 0.001 0.015 **<** 0.010 0.060 **<** 0.05 0.001 2.1 1.40 1.60 3.00 0.60 36.00 05/30/90 5.9 5022 2880 320 317 2.36
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APPENDIX 2

STATISTICAL DETERMINATION OF POINT OF COMPLIANCE WELL NICKEL, RADIUM AND URANIUM COMPLIANCE WITH CURRENT GROUND WATER PROTECTION LIMITS AND PROPOSED ALARA CONCENTRATIONS

This appendix presents the determination of the compliance status of the Point of Compliance (POC) Well nickel (Ni), Radium 226 + 228 (RA 226 + 228) and natural uranium (UNAT) data with the Ground Water Protection Limits (GPLs) and the proposed As Low As Reasonably Achievable (ALARA) concentrations based on the Corrective Action Plan. The compliance determinations are based on statistical tools found in the EPA February, 1989 Interim Final Guidance document titled "Statistical Analysis Of Ground-Water Monitoring Data At RCRA Facilities" (EPA, 1989). This document is very relevant given the fact the NRC ground water regulations for uranium tailing basins were extracted from the RCRA regulations. Sections 4.2.2 and 6 of the guidance document were used. The ALARA concentrations proposed are upper limits based on a statistical method used in establishing insitu uranium mining Upper Control Limits for monitor wells.

Graphs of the Ni and Ra 226 + 228 concentrations for Well 175 and the UNAT concentrations for Wells 125 and 177 versus time are found at the end of this Appendix. In a visual sense these help make the case for the proposed ALARA concentrations.

EPA, 1989 presents methods for statistically evaluating the compliance status of normal, lognormal and non-parametric distributions of **POC** well data against fixed compliance limits such as MCLs (EPA drinking water Maximum Concentration Limits), ACLs or other fixed limits (Section 6 of EPA, 1989).

Following the EPA guidance for determining compliance against a Ground Water Protection Limit requires making a decision on whether the measured concentrations for a PHC at a POC follow a normal, lognormal or non-parametric statistical distribution (Section 4.2.2 of EPA, 1989). EPA, 1989 presents a simple method for making this statistical distribution determination. The EPA method was used on the data as presented in Table A2.1. If a normal statistical distribution was indicated, a normal distribution was assumed for the subsequent calculations. If a normal distribution was not found, the method was applied to the natural log-rhythms of the data. If normality was indicated, the data follow a lognormal distribution. Otherwise, a non-parametric distribution is indicated.

Normal mean, lognormal mean, and non-parametric median values and confidence limits were calculated from the concentration data using the EPA methods. These calculated values, along with the EPA method determination of whether the data for a PHC at a POC well followed a normal, lognormal or non-parametric distribution, are provided in Table A2-2. The table also lists the current GPLs and determinations from the calculated values of whether each PHC at each POC is in compliance with the appropriate GPL.

EPA, 1989 does not provide guidance on the statistical method for determining ALARA concentrations from monitoring data following operation of a corrective action program) since ALARA is not a RCRA concept. However, the NRC has shown a preference for

limits that do not require a statistical test to enforce. This has been institutionalized for **ACL** applications by setting ALARA based limits that are sufficiently high that there is only a small probability that any measurement would exceed the measurement if the water quality does not deteriorate. Such an upper limit must also be lower than the sitespecific **POC** limits based on health and environmental limits at the POEs.

A 95% confidence interval is used in expressing precision for radionuclide measurements. This confidence limit equals the mean plus 1.96 standard deviations. If a limit were set at the upper confidence limit (mean plus 1.96 standard deviations), there would only be a 5% chance of a false positive. That is, only 5% of future measurements should exceed the limit. The chance of two consecutive measurements exceeding the limit would be very small unless the water quality significantly deteriorated.

ECMC proposes to set the ALARA values at the 95% Upper Confidence Limit. If a sample result exceeds the limit, ECMC would examine the measurement using the NRC recommended procedure for insitu uranium mining Upper Control Limit data.

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TABLE **A2.1**

Determination of Statistical Distribution

NOTES:

• Coefficient-of-Variation (CV) = absolute value
Standard Deviation (Std. Dev.)

from Section 4.2.2 of EPA at February 1989 Statistical Analysis of Ground-Water Monitoring Data at RCRA Facilities - Interim Final Guidance. A CV of one or less indicates a normal distribution can be assumed for the data set.

* A normal distribution is assumed if the normal CV is less than I. Otherwise, a lognormal distribution is assumed if the lognormal CV is less than I. Otherwise, a non-parametric distribution is assumed.

TABLE **A2.2**

NOTES: Ni (mg/I), Ra 226+228 (pCi/I), UNAT (pCi/i)

***** To determine the ALARA concentrations for Wells 175 and 177, only the more recent results were used

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since earlier the concentration had been increasing.

** Used Well 177 ALARA concentration.

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STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF GROUND-WATER MONITORING DATA AT RCRA FACILITIES - INTERIM FINAL GUIDANCE

(U.S.) Environmental Protection Agency Washington, DC

Feb 89

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE National Technical Information Service

SECTION 6

COMPARISONS WITH MCLs OR ACLs

This section includes statistical procedures appropriate when the monitoring aims at determining whether ground-water concentrations of hazardous constituents are below or above fixed concentration limits. In this situation the maximum concentration limit (MCL) or alternate concentration limit (ACL) is a specified concentration limit rather than being determined by the background well concentrations. Thus the applicable statistical procedures are those that compare the compliance well concentrations estimated from sampling with the prespecified fixed limits. Methods for comparing compliance well concentrations to a (variable) background concentration were presented in Section 5.

The methods applicable to the type of comparisons described in this section include confidence intervals and tolerance intervals. A special section deals with cases where the observations exhibit very small or no variability.

6.1 SUMMARY CHART FOR COMPARISON WITH MCLs OR ACLs

.. Figure **6-1** is a flow chart to aid the user in selecting and applying a statistical method when the permit specifies an MCL or ACL.

As with each type of comparison, a determination is made first to see if there are enough data for intra-well comparisons. If so, these should be done in parallel with the other comparisons.

Here, whether the compliance limit is a maximum concentration limit (MCL) or an alternate concentration limit (ACL), the reconmmended procedure to compare the mean compliance well concentration against the compliance limit is the construction of a confidence interval. This approach is presented in Section 6.2.1. Section 6.2.2 adds a special case of limited variance in the data. If the permit requires that a compliance limit is not to be exceeded If the permit requires that a compliance limit is not to be exceeded more than a specified fraction of the time, then the construction of tolerance limits is the recommended procedure, discussed in Section 6.2.3.

6.2 STATISTICAL PROCEDURES

This section presents the statistical procedures appropriate for comparison of ground-water monitoring data to a constant compliance limit, a fixed standard. The interpretation of the fixed compliance limit (MCL or ACL) is that the mean concentration should not exceed this fixed limit. An alternate interpretation may be specified. The permit could specify a compliance limit as a concentration not to be exceeded by more than a small, specified

6-1

Comparisons with MCLJACLs

Figure **6-1.** Comparisons with **MCLs/ACLs.**

6-2

situation is also presented.

proportion of the observations. A tolerance interval approach for such a

6.2.1 Confidence Intervals

When a regulated unit is in compliance monitoring with a fixed compliance limit (either an MCL or an ACL), confidence intervals are the recommended procedure pursuant to §264.97(h)(5) in the Subpart F regulations. The unit will remain in compliance monitoring unless there is statistically significant evidence that the mean concentration at one or more of the downgradient wells exceeds the compliance limit. A confidence interval for the mean concentration is constructed from the sample data for each compliance well individually. These confidence intervals are compared with the compliance limit. If the entire confidence interval exceeds the compliance limit, this is statistically significant evidence that the mean concentration exceeds the compliance' limit.

Confidence intervals can generally be constructed for any specified distribution. General methods can be found in texts on statistical inference some of which are referenced in Appendix C. A confidence limit based on the normal distribution is presented first, followed by a modification for the log-normal distribution. A nonparametric confidence interval. is also presented.

6.2.1.1 Confidence Interval Based on the Normal Distribution

PURPOSE

The confidence interval for the mean concentration is constructed from the compliance well data. Once the interval has been constructed, it can be compared with the MCL or ACL by inspection to determine whether the mean concentration significantly exceeds the MCL-or ACL.

PROCEDURE

Step 1. Calculate the mean, \bar{X} , and standard deviation, S, of the sample concentration values. Do this separately for each compliance well.

Step 2. For each well calculate the confidence interval as

$$
\bar{x} \pm t_{(0.99, n-1)} \cdot s/\sqrt{n}
$$

where $t_{(0.99, n-1)}$ is obtained from the t-table (Table 6, Appendix B). Generally, there will be at least four observations at each sampling period, so t will usually have at least 3 degrees of freedom.

Step 3. Compare the intervals calculated in Step 2 to the compliance limit (the MCL or ACL, as appropriate). If the compliance limit is contained in the interval or is above the upper limit, the unit remains in compliance.

If any well confidence interval's lower limit exceeds the compliance limit, this is statistically significant evidence of contamination.

REMARK

The 99th percentile of the t-distribution is used in constructing the confidence interval. This is consistent with an alpha (probability of Type I error) of 0.01, since the decision on compliance is made by comparing the lower confidence limit to the MCL or ACL. Although the interval as constructed with both upper and lower limits is a 98% confidence interval, the use of it is one-sided, which is consistent with the **1%** alpha level of individual well comparisons.

EXAMPLE

Table 6-1 lists hypothetical concentrations of Aldicarb in three compliance wells. For illustration purposes, the MCL for Aldicarb has been set at 7 ppb. There is no evidence of nonnormality, so the confidence interval based on the normal distribution is used.

TABLE **6-1.** EXAMPLE DATA FOR NORMAL CONFIDENCE INTERVAL--ALDICARB CONCENTRATIONS IN COMPLIANCE WELLS (ppb)

Step 1. Calculate the mean and standard deviation of the concentrations for each compliance well. These statistics are shown in the table above.

Step 2. Obtain the 99th percentile of the t-distribution with $(4-1) = 3$ degrees of freedom from Table 6, Appendix B as 4.541. Then calculate the confidence interval for each well's mean concentration.

> Well **1:** 23.1 ± 4.541(4.9)//4-= (12.0, 34.2) Well 2: 24.6 \pm 4.541(2.3)/ $\sqrt{4}$ = (19.4, 29.8)

Well 3: 4.5 ± 4.541(2.1)/
$$
\sqrt{4}
$$
 = (-0.3, 9.3)

6-4

where the usual convention of expressing the upper and lower limits of the confidence interval in parentheses separated by a comma has been followed.

Step **3.** Compare each confidence interval to the MCL of 7 ppb. When this is done, the confidence interval for Well 1 lies entirely above the MCL of 7, indicating that the mean concentration of Aldicarb in Well **I** significantly exceeds the MCL. Similarly, the confidence interval for Well 2 lies entirely above the MCL of 7. This is significant evidence that the mean concentration in Well 2 exceeds the MCL. However, the confidence interval for Well 3 is mostly below the MCL. Thus, there is no statistically significant evidence that the mean concentration in Well 3 exceeds the MCL.

INTERPRETATION

The confidence interval is an interval constructed so that it should contain the true or population mean with specified confidence (98% in this case). If this interval does not contain the compliance limit, then the mean concentration must differ from the compliance limit. If the lower end of the interval is above the compliance limit, then the mean concentration must be significantly greater than the compliance limit, indicating noncompliance.

6.2.1.2 Confidence Interval for Log-Normal Data

PURPOSE

The purpose of a confidence interval for the mean concentration of lognormal data is to determine whether there is statistically significant evidence that the mean concentration exceeds a fixed compliance limit. The interval gives a range that includes the true mean concentration with confidence 98%. The lower limit will be below the true mean with confidence 99%, corresponding to an alpha of **1%.**

PROCEDURE

This procedure is used to construct a confidence interval for the mean concentration from the compliance well data when the data are log-normal (that is, when the logarithms of the data are normally distributed). Once the interval has been constructed, it can be compared with the MCL or ACL by inspection to determine whether the mean concentration significantly exceeds
the MCL or ACL. Throughout the following procedures and examples, natural Throughout the following procedures and examples, natural logarithms (In) are used.

Step **1.** Take the natural logarithm of each data point (concentration measurement). Also, take the natural logarithm of the compliance limit.

Step 2. Calculate the sample mean and standard deviation of the logtransformed data from each compliance well. (This is Step 1 of the previous section, working now with logarithms.)

WELL **125** - **NATURAL URANIUM**

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WELL 175 **-** RADIUM 226+228

k

WELL **177 - URANIUM**

HIGHLAND TAILINGS BASIN GROUNDWATER **STUDY**

FINAL REPORT

August, 1998

Prepared For:

Exxon Production Research Company and Exxon Coal and Minerals Company Houston, Texas

Original Draft Prepared By:

Rebecca L. Carovillano Consultant to EPR

TECHNICAL PRODUCT (TP) RISK SCREENING FORM

INGS BASIN GROUNDWATER **USER(S)** EXXON COAL AND MINERALS CO.

 T USER(S) EXXON COAL AND MINERALS CO.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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SUMMARY

The piezometric surface map was updated using ground water elevation data measured in wells in September, 1996 and using average 1996 ground water elevations calculated for other site monitoring wells. It was necessary to use the average 1996 data to have sufficient data to map the ground water surface. The piezometric surface map indicates that the ground water mound that used to exist beneath the tailings basin has dissipated to the point where it is significantly reduced in height. Ground water flows from the northeastern edge of the tailings basin towards the west-northwest before it is affected by the flow regime of the Highland Reservoir and begins to flow southwest. Ground water flows from the southeastern edge of the tailings basin towards the west-southwest before it too is affected by the Highland Reservoir and begins to flow to the northwest. Ground water beneath the tailings basin migrates west to the Highland Reservoir. There is no significant ground water flow from the tailings basin to the east or to the south, and therefore neither the North Fork of Box Creek, nor its unnamed tributary east of the tailings dam lies in the path of ground water migrating from the basin area. There is a ground water depression around the Highland Reservoir.

The 1988 location of the chloride front as shown in Figure 2.4 of WWL, 1989 was verified. Because it appeared that the placement of the 1988 seepage front boundary was not consistent relative to a well-defined chloride concentration, an analysis was performed using the average 1988 chloride and TDS measurements. Based upon this analysis, a TDS concentration of 1000 mg/l and a corresponding chloride concentration of 90 mg/I was used to define the placement of the chloride seepage front. As a result, the 1988 location of the chloride seepage front was revised slightly (only the northern edge of the boundary was impacted).

Because this analysis indicated that the location of the 1988 chloride seepage boundary within the finger area was accurate, the contaminated liquid volume within the finger area was not revised from the estimate of 280 million gallons provided by Exxon, 1994. The change in location of the northern boundary did impact the estimates of the total liquid volume within the chloride seepage front. Based upon the revised location of the 1988 chloride seepage front, the total liquid volume was estimated to be 1.7 billion gallons (which is lower than the original estimate of 2.0 billion gallons provided by Exxon, 1994). Using the revised location of the seepage boundary, the total volume capable of draining from the TDSS was estimated to be 0.5 billion gallons.

The chloride seepage front criterion of 90 mg/I that was defined using the 1988 data was applied to estimate the 1996 location of the chloride seepage front. Only one well that had been within the 1988 boundary was found to lie outside of the 1996 boundary. While the chloride concentrations in several of the wells located within the front declined considerably from 1988 to 1996, the configuration of the interpreted chloride front .remained essentially unchanged from the modified 1988 configuration.

For the third quarter of 1996, the total volume of liquid contained within the chloride front was estimated to be 1 billion gallons. Approximately 132 million gallons were contained within the finger area that was also within the chloride front. Approximately 294 million gallons of this liquid were capable of draining from the area defined by the entire chloride front, and 39 million gallons were capable of draining from the portion of the chloride front that overlaps the finger area.

A computer model was developed using Visual MODFLOW in order to estimate the long-term stable elevation of the water surface in the Highland Reservoir once ground water levels stabilize, and to show the stable configuration of the piezometric surface in the vicinity of the site. Hydraulic properties, boundary conditions, and recharge rates that were deemed to be appropriate based upon the modeling efforts of previous investigators as well as a transient calibration performed for this project were used to simulate the long-term configuration of the piezometric surface and Highland Reservoir. The long-term stable level of the Highland Reservoir was estimated to be approximately 5125 ft above msl.

In general, once water levels stabilize, ground water will flow from west to east, with perturbations to this flow regime in the vicinity of the Highland Reservoir and mine. backfill. The rate of flow is greatest to the northwest of the Reservoir (approximately .15 ft/day), and slowest to the northeast of the Reservoir (approximately .05 ft/day). In the vicinity of the tailings basin, the ground water flows from northwest to southeast at a rate of about .03 ft/day, but changes to an easterly flow direction at the eastern edge of the tailings basin. In addition to this change in flow direction, the water table dips below the TDSS and lies within the TDSh in the southeast portion of the tailings basin. As a result, it appears that the portion of the unnamed tributary of the North Fork of Box Creek that lies east of the tailings dam, and the North Fork of Box Creek that lies to the south of the tailings basin, will not intercept ground water migrating from beneath the basin.

Sensitivity analyses were performed in order to determine the degree of uncertainty in the model results based upon uncertainty in the model input parameters. It appears that the model results are most sensitive to order-of-magnitude changes in the hydraulic conductivities assigned to model layers 1 through 4, and to two order-of-magnitude changes to the specific storage in layers 4 through 9. The model results were found to vary by as much as 15% when these parameters were changed in this manner. Model results were less sensitive to the boundary conditions assigned and to recharge rates.

Section **1**

Introduction

Four tasks were performed at the request of Exxon Coal and Minerals Company in order to assist them in pursuing alternative concentration limits (ACLs) for the Highland Uranium Mine site. These tasks are as follows:

Task 1. Updating the piezometric surface map using the most recent ground water elevation data, and estimating the ground water flow rates and flow paths within the Tailings Dam Sandstone (TDSS) and the mine backfill.

Task 2. Verifying the 1988 location of the chloride seepage front and estimating the location of the chloride seepage front using 1996 chloride measurements.

Task 3. Calculating the 1988 and 1996 liquid volumes (in the saturated zone) in the **TDSS** within the chloride seepage front and within the portion of the chloride seepage front that overlies the "finger area"¹.

Task 4. Modeling.the piezometric surface at a time in the future when water levels are stable, and estimating the ground water flow paths and rates at that time.

This report documents the methodology used to perform each task, and the findings for each. Task 1 is described in Section 2, Task 2 in Section 3, Task 3 in Section 4, and Task 4 in Section 5. Section 6 provides a summary of findings, and Section 7 includes a list of references.

¹The area that is being referred to as the "finger area" is that area southwest of the tailings impoundment 'between the impoundment and the Mine Backfill Area.

Section 2

Task **1: 1996** Ground Water Flow Rate and Direction

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this task was to estimate the ground water flow directions and rates in the TDSS and mine backfill using the most recent ground water elevation data available. At the time that this task was performed, the most recent data collected were from September, 1996.

2.2 1996 Ground Water Elevations, Flow Directions and Flow Rates

Inspection of the data provided in Table 1 indicates that for September 1996, ground water elevations were available for a total of six wells and the Highland Reservoir. Because the ground water elevation data for September 1996 are so few and are widely distributed across the site, average 1996 ground water elevations were calculated for the other wells listed in Table 1, and were used to construct a contour map of the piezometric surface.

The configuration of the piezometric surface for the TDSS and mine backfill using the data from Table 1 is shown in Figure 1. Several features are evident from the figure. The ground water mound that used to exist beneath the tailings basin has dissipated to the point where it is significantly reduced in height (now less than 5130 feet (ft) above mean sea level (msl)). This mound was interpreted to be at elevations greater than 5140 ft above msl in 1988 (Water, Waste and Land (WWL), 1989) and greater than 5130 ft above msl in 1994 (Exxon, 1994).

Ground water flows from the northeastern edge of the tailings basin towards the westnorthwest before it is affected by the flow regime of the Highland Reservoir (discussed in the following paragraph) and begins to flow southwest towards the Reservoir. Ground water flows from the southeastern edge of the tailings basin towards the westsouthwest before it too is affected by the Highland Reservoir and begins to flow to the northwest. Ground water beneath the tailings basin migrates west to the Highland Reservoir. There is no significant ground water flow from the tailings basin to the south, and therefore the North Fork of Box Creek does not lie in the path of ground water migration from the basin.

The hydraulic gradient around the Reservoir varies considerably. The magnitude of the gradient is greatest from the south as evident by the closeness of the contour spacing in Figure 1, while the magnitude of the gradient from the north/northwest is less, as evident by the wider contour spacing. However, when the ground water flow velocities are calculated for the south and for the northwest using average hydraulic conductivities at nearby wells (Exxon Production Research Company, 1982), and an

average site-wide porosity of 34 percent, the ground water velocity immediately around the reservoir varies by less than 0.01 ft/day, with an average value of about 0.46 ft/day.

Table 1. 1996 Ground Water Elevation Data for Wells Screened in **TDSS** and Mine Backfill

Notes:

Measurements used to construct the contour map of the piezometric surface are shown above in bold. 1. The ground water elevation lies beneath the bottom of the screen, which is at an elevation of 5134.8 and 5085.9 feet above mean sea level (msl), for wells 015 and 180, respectively.

2. The average 1996 value differed from the value projected for September, 1996 (using a straight line projection from the nearest water level measurement) by less than one foot.

3. The average 1996 value differed from the value projected for September, 1996 (using a straight line projection) by approximately 1.5 feet. \mathcal{L}_{max}

Section **3**

Task 2: Verification and Location of Chloride Seepage Front

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this task was to verify the 1988 location of the chloride seepage front and to estimate the location of the chloride seepage front using 1996 chloride measurements. Data used to perform this task were obtained from Exxon's database of chemical measurements for the site.

3.2 Verification of the Chloride Seepage Front in 1988

Chloride concentrations measured in 1988 were obtained from Exxon's chemical database and compared to those used to estimate the location of the "seepage front" as shown in Figure 2.4 of WWL, 1989. It appears that four concentrations were reported for each well and are annotated on the figure: one was collected in approximately August of 1988, two were collected in September of 1988 and the fourth was collected in either late September or October of 1988. Three wells (Numbers 134, 015 and 125) had at least one other chloride concentration measured at another time, which was not used to determine the placement of the seepage front. For each of the three wells, this additional concentration was greater than any of the four measurements used in Figure 2.4 (WWL, 1989), but they would not have affected the placement of the seepage front. In addition, the fourth measurement for well number 117 was not reported on Figure 2.4 (WWL, 1989) and may not have been used to determine the location of the seepage front. This omission would also not have affected the location of the 1988 chloride seepage front.

In general, the placement of the 1988 seepage front is questionable since it is not evident from Figure 2.4 (WWL, 1989) what chloride concentration was used to define the seepage front boundary. Section 2.2.5 of VWVL, 1989 describes a background chloride concentration of 20 milligrams per liter (mg/I). It is evident however, that 20 mg/I was not used to define the seepage front, as shown by the placement of well 173 (with an average 1988 chloride concentration of 66 mg/I) outside of the boundary. In contrast, wells 181, 179 and 183, which have chloride concentrations that are approximately equal to or less than well 173, are placed inside the seepage front. A different document ("Supporting Information for **ACL** Application," Exxon, 1994) refers to a chloride seepage front concentration of 110 mg/l. Again, it appears that this concentration was not used to consistently define the location of the seepage front boundary due to the placement of wells 181, 179 and 183 (all with concentrations less than 110 mg/I) inside the boundary. In conclusion, it appears that the placement of the 1988 seepage front boundary was not consistent relative to a well defined chloride -concentration.

In order to better identify the region where the ground water quality may have been impacted by mining activities (and thus should be included within the chloride seepage front boundary), plots were constructed that show the average 1988 chloride concentration versus total dissolved solids (TDS), and average 1988 chloride concentration versus pH for all of the monitoring wells. TDS and pH were used since they tend to be reliable indicators of overall ground water quality. Figure 2 is a graph of average 1988 chloride concentrations versus pH. This figure indicates that there is no consistent relationship between ground water pH and chloride concentration, especially at low chloride concentrations. For example, five wells with chloride concentrations of less than 50 mg/I had pH measurements that ranged from about 7.7 to 9.7. Four of these five wells are considered to be background wells and are therefore outside the influence of any mine-related activities on ground water quality. Consequently, it was determined that pH could not be used reliably to assist in locating the chloride seepage front.

A graph of average 1988 chloride concentration versus TDS, shown in Figure 3, exhibits a linear trend (chloride concentration increases as TDS increases). The wells also appear to plot into two clusters: cluster 1 includes those wells that have TDS concentrations of around 1000 mg/I or less, and cluster 2 includes those wells that have a TDS concentration of 2000 mg/I and above (there are no wells between the two clusters). An inspection of Figure 3 suggests that wells 174, 182, 172, 134 and 127 lie outside of the seepage front due to their low chloride concentrations (<25 mg/I). Four of these wells (174, 182, 172 and 134) are considered to be background monitoring wells. Well Number 134, despite its low chloride concentration, has a TDS concentration of approximately 1000 mg/I, which is considerably higher than the TDS concentration of the other background wells. If a TDS concentration of 1000 mg/I is used for an upper limit for water outside the chloride seepage front, then wells 173, 181, 183 and 171(shown on Figure 3 with triangle symbols) would also lie outside of the seepage front. All of these wells also have chloride concentrations of less than 90 mg/I, which is still quite low relative to the State of Wyoming drinking water criteria of 250 mg/l. Only one well (well 179) in cluster 1 has a TDS concentration of just greater than 1000 mg/I and a chloride concentration equal to 90 mg/I, and this is the only well in the cluster interpreted to lie within the seepage front. All of the wells in cluster 2 lie within the seepage front.

Based upon this analysis it was determined that wells 174, 182, 172, 127, 134, 181, 171, 173 and 183 should lie outside of the 1988 chloride seepage front, while all of the other wells should lie within the front. This conclusion does impact the previous interpretation of the 1988 seepage boundary location in the vicinity of wells 181, 183 and 179, north of the tailings basin.

The 1988 interpretation of the chloride seepage front has also been modified in the area southwest of the tailings basin. The previous interpretation had the seepage front in this area coinciding with the southwestern boundary of the finger area, nearly midway between wells 178 and 173. However, well 178 had an average chloride concentration

of 322 mg/I (for 1988 data) while well 173 had an average concentration of 65 mg/I. While it may not be entirely correct to use a strict linear interpolation to locate the 90 mg/I chloride contour, it would appear to be more correct than the arbitrary manner in which the front was originally placed. Linear interpolation was also used for the pair of data at wells 180 and 173.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the revised interpretation for the location of the 1988 chloride seepage front is shown in Figure 4.

3.3 Location of the 1996 Chloride Seepage Front

A similar analysis was performed using the chloride and TDS concentrations measured in 1996. Figure 5 is a plot of average 1996 chloride versus TDS concentrations in the wells. The wells no longer plot in two distinct clusters -- there are three wells with TDS concentrations of between 1000 and 2000 mg/l. If the chloride seepage front criterion of 90 mg/I that was defined using the 1988 data is applied to the 1996 data, wells 174, 182, 172, 134, 171, 127, 173, 183 and 125 would lie outside of the seepage front (all of these wells are shown with either diamond or triangle symbols on the figure). With the exception of well 125, these are the same wells that were outside of the seepage front in 1988. The chloride concentration in well 125 declined considerably since 1988 (from 219 to 71 mg/I) such that in 1996 the well no longer lies within the seepage front.

The chloride seepage front location in 1996 is shown in Figure 6. The configuration of the northern portion of the boundary is essentially the same as that in 1988. The configuration to the southwest of the tailings basin is also nearly the same as it was in 1988. Chloride concentration in well 173 - the only data point that can be used to fix the location of the seepage front in this area - increased from an average of 65 mg/l in 1988 to 84 mg/I in 1996.

Due to lack of data in the area west of the tailings basin, in the area directly northwest of wells 180, 175 and 114, the 1988 interpretation of the chloride seepage front'has not been modified in this area. Nevertheless, the 1996 interpretation in slightly different, with the front placed closer to the tailings basin. This is not based on any data specifically, only that the front appears smoother as presented.

Section 4

Task **3:** Liquid Volumes Within the **TDSS** Chloride Front and Finger Area

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this task was to calculate the 1988 and 1996 liquid volumes (in the saturated zone) in the TDSS within the chloride seepage front, and within that portion of the chloride seepage front which lies within the finger area.

The liquid volumes within the TDSS 1988 chloride seepage front and finger area are discussed in WWL, 1989 and were later revised by Exxon using MINEX software (Exxon, 1994). Exxon also estimated the liquid volumes within the TDSS 1994 chloride seepage front and finger area (Exxon, 1994). For the purpose of this task, only Exxon's revised 1988 volumes and 1994 volumes will be referred to (Exxon, 1994).

4.2 1988 Liquid Volumes Within that Portion of the Chloride Front that:

(a) Lies Within the TDSS

(b) Lies Within the Finger Area

The previous estimate for the volume of liquid inside the entire chloride front within the **TDSS** has now been changed based upon the revision to the location of the chloride front as shown in Figure 4. The change in estimate arises from the modification to the chloride front north of the tailings basin but not due to the modification to the front southwest of the basin. This is because the extension of the front to the southwest is into the mine backfill, not into the TDSS. Exxon (1994) estimated that the total liquid volume inside the chloride front in 1998 was 2.0 billion gallons and that 0.6 billion gallons of this was drainable (again based on a specific yield of 0.1). Using the revised chloride front shown in Figure 4, these volumes are now estimated to be 1.7 billion gallons and 0.5 billion gallons, respectively.

Because the analysis performed in Task 2 corroborated the previous location (Exxon, 1994) of the 1988 chloride seepage front within the finger area, the estimate of the corresponding liquid volume remains unchanged from the earlier estimate of 280 million gallons (Exxon, 1994). Using a specific yield value of 0.1, it was estimated that 80 million gallons of this volume could be drained from the TDSS within the finger area (Exxon, 1994).

4.3 1996 Liquid Volumes Within that Portion of the Chloride Front that:

(a) Lies Within the TDSS

(b) Lies Within the Finger Area

Liquid volumes within the TDSS 1996 chloride seepage front and finger area were calculated using the TDSh structure contour map to estimate the saturated thickness of the TDSS². For the third quarter of 1996, the total liquid volume inside the chloride front was estimated to be 1 billion gallons. It was also estimated that approximately 132 million gallons were contained within that portion of the chloride front which overlapped the finger area. These estimates do not include water in the unsaturated zone and are based on an estimated site-wide TDSS porosity of 34 percent.

A specific yield of 0.1 was used to estimate the volume of liquid capable of draining from the TDSS, and from the finger area. The resulting estimated volumes were 294 million gallons capable of draining from inside the entire chloride front, and 39 million gallons from the area inside the chloride front.that overlaps the finger area.

The 1994 estimates reported in Exxon (1994) were:

- 1.5 billion gallons of liquid contained in the TDSS within the area enclosed by entire chloride front.
- 140 million gallons of liquid contained in the TDSS within the portion of the chloride front which overlaps the finger area
- 400 million gallons of liquid capable of draining from the TDSS in the area within the chloride front
- * 40 million gallons of liquid capable of draining from the TDSS in the portion inside ,the chloride front that overlaps the finger area.

These volumes were also based on a TOSS porosity of 34% and a specific yield of 0.1.

The decline in volume of contaminated water from 1988 to 1996 is due primarily to the fact that the saturated thickness of the TDSS in the region defined by the chloride seepage front is declining as the ground water mound beneath the tailings basin continues to dissipate.

² None of the reports made available to EPR contain any description of the MINEX software based method used by Exxon to estimate the 1988 and 1994 liquid volumes. To check that the method used in the current study produces results that are comparable to those based on the MINEX software, the former was used to estimate 1988 liquid volumes. The results were very close to the previous MINEX based results.

Section **5**

Task 4: Ground Water Model of the Piezometric Surface

5.1 Introduction

A computer model was developed in order to estimate the long-term average or steady state elevation of the water surface in the Highland Reservoir once ground water levels stabilize, and to show the stable configuration of the piezometric surface in the vicinity of the site. Visual MODFLOW (Waterloo Hydrogeologic) was used to develop the model and solve the ground water flow equation. Visual MODFLOW is based on MODFLOW, a finite difference model developed by the United States Geological Survey, but includes significant pre- and post-processing capabilities. The sections below discuss the configuration of the model, calibration results, the simulated longterm stable Reservoir elevation, and sensitivity analyses performed.

5.2 Model Configuration

The model domain, shown in Figure 7, is 30,000 feet by 30,000 feet. The Highland Reservoir lies approximately in the center of the model domain. The model grid consists of 96 columns and 80 rows, with a finite difference node located at the center of each block formed by the intersection of a row and column.

Vertically, the model consists of nine layers (layer **1** is the most shallow, layer 9 is the deepest). Layers 1 and 2 represent the Fowler and TDSS formations. Layer 3 represents the TDSh, and layers 4 through 9 represent the upper, middle and lower Ore Body Sandstones, and the two aquitards that lie between the upper and middle sands, and the middle and lower sands. In the vicinity of the Highland Reservoir, mine backfill is represented by specific node blocks in layers 1 through 8. This is also true of the Highland Reservoir itself, which is defined by specific nodes in layers 1 through 9. Average hydraulic properties were initially assigned to each model layer based upon tests performed in the vicinity of the site. These were later refined as part of the transient calibration and are discussed in the following section.

5.3 Transient Calibration

A transient calibration was performed in order to refine the hydraulic properties assigned to the various model layers. The calibration "target" was the average annual water level measured in site monitoring wells in 1996.

5.3.1 Initial and Boundary Conditions

The initial condition for the transient calibration consisted of average 1988 ground water levels across the site. The same ground water elevations were used as the initial condition for each model layer. The year 1988 was selected as the starting point for the transient calibration (as opposed to an earlier year) in order to maximize the amount of well data available to compare with the model results.

A constant head boundary condition was used on the western and eastern edges of the model for most of the model layers. In layers 1 and 2, the western boundary condition was fixed at an elevation of 5200 ft above msl. This value was obtained by projecting the average hydraulic gradient at the western edge of piezometric surface maps from 1988 (WWL, 1989) and 1994 (Exxon, 1994) back to the western boundary of the model. The western boundary of layer 3 was fixed at an elevation of 5175 ft above msl. In layers 4 through 9, the western boundary was fixed at a constant head that increased with time, as shown below in Table 2.

These values were based on measurements of ground water elevations in the Ore Body Sands in the vicinity of the western boundary of the model. Water levels in the sands were greatly impacted in the early 1980s by underground operations associated with a Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) mine. Since the mid-1980s, underground operations have ceased at the TVA mine. Recent ground water measurements (January 1997) at wells near the western boundary indicate that water levels in the Ore Body Sands have risen approximately 100 ft.

To the east, the TDSS and TDSh outcrop. In the field, the outcrop of the top of the TDSh shows no evidence of ground water seepage. As a result, it can be assumed that the piezometric surface in the TDSS west of the outcrop drops beneath the top of the TDSh before the outcrop occurs. Therefore, a no-flow boundary condition was defined for model layer **1** at the TDSh outcrop. In layers 2 and 3, the eastern boundary does not lie along the eastern edge of the model domain, but instead follows the line of the TDSh outcrop as shown in Figure 8. Ground water elevations along this eastern boundary were set equal to the elevations of the top of layers 2 and 3. All of the nodes to the east of the TDSh outcrop in layers 1 through 3 were defined to be inactive.

The eastern boundary in layers 4 through 9 was located along the eastern edge of the model domain since there was no information regarding outcrops of the Ore Body Sands in this region. Ground water elevations along the eastern boundary in layers 4 through 9 were set equal to an elevation of approximately one foot above the bottom of layer 4.

It should be noted that along the western and eastern boundaries, the head difference above and below layer 3 indicates that the TDSh is believed to be laterally extensive across the model domain and is an effective aquitard. In contrast, the value of the constant head boundary condition is the same in layers 4 through 9 because the Ore Body Sands are believed to be in hydraulic communication across the model domain and the aquitard units between the Ore Body Sands are not laterally extensive.

5.3.2 Recharge

Three different recharge zones were defined for the model domain, as shown in Figure 9. The first (not explicitly shown in the Figure) was applied to the entire model domain, except those regions shown in color on the Figure. This recharge zone was set at a constant rate of 0.5 inches per year, and represents the amount of rainfall available to infiltrate to ground water after evapotranspiration.

The second recharge zone is shown in green, and lies within the tailings basin outline. Here, the ground water from the extraction wells (discussed below) is discharged into an evaporation pit. The size of the pit is approximately 1.5 acres (the size of two grid blocks in this portion of the model domain), and the amount of recharge assigned to the zone varied from 4.7 inches/year to negative 24 inches/year (a loss of water from the evaporation pit) depending upon the amount of discharge from the wells.

Finally, the Reservoir surface, which is shown in blue in Figure 9, was defined as the third recharge zone. For the time period simulated for the transient calibration, it was held constant at a rate of 42.5 inches/year. It was estimated using the water balance shown in Table 3, which is based upon work performed by Exxon Production Research Company (Exxon Production Research Company, 1983). The estimate of 42.5 inches/year indicates that during this time frame, ground water inflow greatly exceeded ground water outflow and evaporation.

Table 3. Water Balance Used to Estimate Net Recharge at the Reservoir Surface

5.3.3 Ground Water Extraction Wells

As many as five wells have been extracting ground water from the finger zone since 1989. The average annual pumping rate for each of the wells was used in the model to simulate pumping conditions. The average annual pumping rates in gallons per minute (gpm) for the wells are shown in Table 4 and the location of the wells are shown in Figure 10.

Table 4. Average Annual Ground Water Extraction Rates (in gpm) Used in Model **Calibration**

5.3.4 Transient Calibration Results

The configuration of the piezometric surface for the TDSS and mine backfill using the calibrated model output is shown in Figure 11. In general, the calibrated model output agrees well with the average 1996 piezometric surface. In the vicinity of the tailings basin, the modeled piezometric surface is approximately one to four feet lower than the average 1996 piezometric surface. Close to the Highland Reservoir, the modeled piezometric surface matches the 1996 surface very closely. The modeled piezometric surface differs from the 1996 piezometric surface in the southeast portion of the mine backfill, and south of the Reservoir. In general, however, the modeled ground water flow velocities agree well with average 1996 conditions. The final hydraulic properties assigned to each model layer are summarized below in Table 5.

Table 5. Hydraulic Properties Assigned to Calibrated Model Layers

5.4 Long-term Simulations

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The hydraulic properties, initial condition, and boundary conditions discussed in section 5.3 were used to simulate the long-term configuration of the piezometric surface and Highland Reservoir. For the purpose of the long-term simulations, it was assumed that no ground water extraction occurs within the model domain after 1996, and there was no corresponding recharge of the extracted ground water via the evaporation pond. The recharge rate assigned to the Reservoir surface declined to a rate of 0.2 inches/year, based on the assumption that as the Reservoir begins to fill more slowly, ground water outflow increases, and the greater surface area of the Reservoir allows for increased evaporation (refer to Table 4).

The long-term configuration of the piezometric surface in the TDSS and mine backfill is shown in Figure 12. The long-term stable level of the Highland Reservoir is estimated to be approximately 5125 ft above msl. In general, ground water flows from west to east, with perturbations to this flow regime in the vicinity of the Highland Reservoir and mine backfill. The rate of flow is greatest to the northwest of the Reservoir (approximately **.15** ft/day), and slowest to the northeast of the Reservoir (approximately .05 ft/day). Ground water flow velocities were estimated using an average hydraulic conductivity for the site (.002 cm/sec), and an average site-wide porosity of 34 percent.

In the vicinity of the tailings basin, ground water flows from the northwest to the southeast at a rate of about .03 ft/day, but changes to an easterly flow direction at the eastern edge of the tailings basin. Beneath the northwest portion of the tailings basin, ground water flows from northwest to southeast. In the southeast portion of the tailings basin, the water table actually lies within the TDSh and the direction of ground water flow starts to change to more of an easterly direction. As a result, it appears that the portion of the unnamed tributary of the North Fork of Box Creek that lies east of the tailings dam, and the North Fork of Box Creek that lies to the south of the tailings basin, will not intercept ground water migrating from beneath the basin. Ground water flow velocities were estimated using an average hydraulic conductivity for the site (.002 cm/sec), and an average site-wide porosity of 34 percent.

5.4.1 Sensitivity Analyses

Sensitivity analyses were performed in order to determine the degree of uncertainty in the model results based upon uncertainty in the model input parameters. All sensitivity analyses, except those performed on the value of specific storage, were performed as steady state simulations in order to greatly reduce the computational effort required.

Hydraulic Conductivity

The values of the hydraulic conductivities assigned to the model layers were increased and then decreased by an order of magnitude in order to evaluate the sensitivity of the final Reservoir elevation to the values used. In general, an order of magnitude change in hydraulic conductivity in any of the layers resulted in a change in the long-term stable Reservoir elevation of about 15% or less. For most of the layers, the change in Reservoir elevation was less than 10% (a 10% change is approximately 15 feet): The Reservoir elevation was most sensitive to the hydraulic conductivity assigned to model layers 1 and 4.

Recharge

The values assigned to the two recharge zones (the areal recharge zone and the zone assigned to the Reservoir surface) used in the steady state simulation were changed to determine the sensitivity of the long-term stable Reservoir elevation to the values used. For the first sensitivity analysis, the recharge assigned to the entire model domain was increased from 0.5 inches/year to 1.5 inches/year. This change had a negligible impact (approximately 3%) on the long-term stable Reservoir elevation. For the second sensitivity analysis, the net recharge to the Reservoir surface was changed in a rather extreme manner from 0.2 inches/year to -50 inches/year. While the estimates of net recharge to the Reservoir provided in Table 3 are not as low as -50 inches/year, this value is similar to estimates of pan evaporation rates in the area and therefore is considered to be reasonable. This change in the net recharge to the Reservoir also had a negligible impact (it resulted in a decline of less than 3%) on the long-term stable Reservoir elevation.

Boundary Conditions

The boundary conditions were modified in order to evaluate the sensitivity of the final Reservoir elevation to the values assigned. In layers 1 through 3, the western boundary condition was decreased by 20 ft. This resulted in a negligible (approximately 3%) decline in the long-term stable Reservoir elevation. A 20 ft increase in the western boundary condition for layers 1 through 3 also resulted in an increase in Reservoir elevation of about 3%.

For layers 4 through 9, the western boundary condition was increased from 5125 to -5150 ft above msl. This resulted in an almost 7% increase in the long-term stable
Reservoir elevation. A corresponding decrease in the boundary condition for layers 4 through 9 was not made, since current water level measurements are at or below 5125 feet above msl, and while it is believed that the ground water system in these layers may continue to rebound slightly, water levels are not expected to decline.

To the east, the boundary condition in layers 2 and 3 was lowered by 10 feet in order to evaluate the impact on the long-term stable Reservoir elevation. The resulting Reservoir elevation was essentially the same (a less than 2% decline) as the original elevation. In layers 4 through 9, the eastern boundary conditions were increased by 20 feet. This resulted in a less than 2% increase in the long-term stable Reservoir elevation simulated by the model.

Specific Storage

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Out of necessity, the sensitivity analyses performed on specific storage were performed as transient simulations. The computational effort required was significant and limited the number of analyses that could be performed to two. The first sensitivity analysis performed was on the value of specific storage and specific yield used in layers 1 and 2. Here, the specific storage was increased by two orders of magnitude, and specific yield was increased 33%. The result was a less than 7% decrease in the long-term stable Reservoir elevation.

The second sensitivity analysis was on the value of specific storage used in the model layers that correspond to the Ore Body Sands and the aquitards between the sands (layers 4 through 9). Again, the specific storage was increased by two orders of magnitude (the specific yield was also increased by 33%). The resulting Reservoir elevation was approximately 13% lower. While the model results are certainly more sensitive to the value of specific storage used in layers 4 through 9 as opposed to layers 1 and 2, the change can still be considered to be rather minimal when compared to the overall rise in water level in the Reservoir.

Findings

The piezometric surface map was updated using ground water elevation data measured in wells in September, 1996 and using average 1996 ground water elevations calculated for other site monitoring wells. It was necessary to use the average 1996 data to have sufficient data to map the ground water surface. The piezometric surface map indicates that the ground water mound that used to exist beneath the tailings basin has dissipated to the point where it is significantly reduced in height. Ground water flows from the northeastern edge of the tailings basin towards the west-northwest before it is affected by the flow regime of the Highland Reservoir and begins to flow southwest. Ground water flows from-the southeastern edge of the tailings basin towards the west-southwest before it too is affected by the Highland Reservoir and begins to flow to the northwest. Ground water beneath the tailings basin migrates west to the Highland Reservoir. There is no significant ground water flow from the tailings basin to the east or to the south, and therefore neither the North Fork of Box Creek, nor its unnamed tributary east of the tailings dam lies in the path of ground water migrating from the basin area. There is a ground water depression around the Highland Reservoir.

The 1988 location of the chloride front as shown in Figure 2.4 of WWL, 1989 was verified. Because it appeared that the placement of the 1988 seepage front boundary was not consistent relative to a well-defined chloride concentration, an analysis was performed using the average 1988 chloride and TDS measurements. Based upon this analysis, a TDS concentration of 1000 mg/I and a corresponding chloride concentration of 90 mg/I was used to define the placement of the chloride seepage front. As a result, the 1988 location of the chloride seepage front was revised slightly (only the northern edge of the boundary was impacted).

Because this analysis indicated that the location of the 1988 chloride seepage boundary within the finger area was accurate, the contaminated liquid volume within the finger area was not revised from the estimate of 280 million gallons provided by Exxon, 1994. The change in location of the northern boundary did impact the estimates of the total liquid volume within the chloride seepage front. Based upon the revised location of the 1988 chloride seepage front, the total liquid volume was estimated to be 1.7 billion gallons (which is lower than the original estimate of 2.0 billion gallons provided by Exxon, 1994). Using the revised location of the seepage boundary, the total volume capable of draining from the TDSS was estimated to be 0.5 billion gallons.

The chloride seepage front criterion of 90 mg/I that was defined using the 1988 data was applied to estimate the 1996 location of the chloride seepage front. Only one well that had been within the 1988 boundary was found to lie outside of the 1996 boundary. While the chloride concentrations in several of the wells located within the front declined

considerably from 1988 to 1996, the configuration of the interpreted chloride front remained essentially unchanged from the modified 1988 configuration.

For the third quarter of 1996, the total volume of liquid contained within the chloride front was estimated to be 1 billion gallons. Approximately 132 million gallons were contained within the finger area that was also within the chloride front. Approximately 294 million gallons of this liquid were capable of draining from the area defined by the entire chloride front, and 39 million gallons were capable of draining from the portion of the chloride front that overlaps the finger area.

A computer model was developed using Visual MODFLOW in order to estimate the long-term stable elevation of the water surface in the Highland Reservoir once ground water levels stabilize, and to show the stable configuration of the piezometric surface in the vicinity of the site. Hydraulic properties, boundary conditions, and recharge rates that were deemed to be appropriate based upon the modeling efforts of previous investigators as well as a transient calibration performed for this project were used to simulate the long-term configuration of the piezometric surface and Highland Reservoir. The long-term stable level of the Highland Reservoir was estimated to be approximately 5125 ft above msl.

In general, once water levels stabilize, ground water will flow from west to east, with perturbations to this flow regime in the vicinity of the Highland Reservoir and mine backfill. The rate of flow is greatest to the northwest of the Reservoir (approximately .15 ft/day), and slowest to the northeast of the Reservoir (approximately .05 ft/day). In the vicinity of the tailings basin, the ground water flows from northwest to southeast at a rate of about .03 ft/day, but changes to an easterly flow direction at the eastern edge of the tailings basin. In addition to this change in flow direction, the water table dips below the TDSS and lies within the TDSh in the southeast portion of the tailings basin. As a result, it appears that the portion of the unnamed tributary of the North Fork of Box Creek that lies east of the tailings dam, and the North Fork of Box Creek that lies to the south of the tailings basin, will not intercept ground water migrating from beneath the basin.

Sensitivity analyses were performed in order to determine the degree of uncertainty in the model results based upon uncertainty in the model input parameters. It appears that the model results are most sensitive to order-of-magnitude changes in the hydraulic conductivities assigned to model layers 1 through 4, and to two order-of-magnitude changes to the specific storage in layers 4 through 9. The model results were found to vary by as much as 15% when these parameters were changed in this manner. Model results were less sensitive to the boundary conditions assigned and to recharge rates.

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Section **7**

References

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FIGURES

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Note:

Figure 2. Average 1988 Chloride Concentrations versus pH

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Figure 3. Average 1988 Chloride versus TDS Concentrations

● Background Wells B Wells Within Seepage Boundary A Wells Outside Seepage Boundary

Figure 4. Revised Location of the 1988 Chloride Seepage Front

Figure 5. Average 1996 Chloride versus TDS Concentrations

 $\frac{174}{2}$ $182'$ 183 1996 CHLORIDE CONCENTRATIONS (mg/l) PERIMETER OF MINE AREA 2ND VALUE WELL NUMBER **IST VALUR** 176 1.27 015 DRY DRY $\bf 112$ $167\,$ 181 120 114 205 328 117 353 310 MAXIMUM EXTENT OF TAILINGS SEEPAGE MIGRATION 120 $\bf .278$ 329 $1,25$ 69.2 73.1 `i 25 \mathcal{N}_{015} TAILINGS BASIN ,114 V_{180} $127\,$ 44 51 $134 - 3$ 7.6 175 **BACKFILLED MINE AREA** 173 80 88.4 $174 4.8$ 6.4 117 175 $27\,\mathrm{t}$ 325 HIGHLAND RESERVOIR 177 176 $\bar{z}3.2$ $338\,$ 177 272 276 178 178 279 368 179 135 135 180 DRY DRY WELL NUMBER 181 $\bf 112$ $\bar{\mathbf{1}}\mathbf{1}\bar{\mathbf{1}}$ 4.7 $182 5.1$ WEIL LOCATION 88 183 80.5 $\frac{1}{2}$

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Figure 7. Extent of Ground Water Model Domain

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Figure 8. Location of the Eastern Boundary (Shown in Red) in Layers 2 and 3 (Inactive Nodes are Shown in Grey)

Figure 12. Long-Term Configuration of the Piezometric Surface in the TDSS and Mine Backfill

MODELING ADDENDUM

September, 1997

Prepared For:

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LIST OF **TABLES AND** FIGURES

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Section 1. Introduction

This Addendum was prepared to document the modeling effort performed on behalf of Exxon Production Research Company and Exxon Coal and Minerals Company for the Highland Reservoir project. A computer model was developed in order to predict the ultimate elevation of the water surface in the Highland Reservoir once ground water levels stabilize, and to show the stable configuration of the piezometric surface in the vicinity of the Site. Visual MODFLOW (Waterloo Hydrogeologic) was used to develop the model and solve the ground water flow equation. Visual MODFLOW is based on MODFLOW, a finite difference code developed by the United States Geological Survey (USGS), but includes significant pre- and post-processing capabilities.

The Modeling Addendum contains four sections. Section 2 documents the configuration of the model; Section 3 describes the results of the transient calibration, and Section 4 describes the long-term simulations performed.

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Section 2. Model Configuration

The model domain, shown in Figure 1, is 30,000 feet by 30,000 feet. The Highland Reservoir lies approximately in the center of the model domain. The model grid consists of 96 columns and 80 rows, with a finite difference node located at the center of each block formed by the intersection of a row and column. The largest grid blocks (located at the outermost edges of the domain) have approximate dimensions of 1800 by 1600 feet, while the smallest grid blocks (located near the Highland Reservoir) measure approximately 200 by 200 feet.

Vertically, the model consists of nine layers (layer 1 is the most shallow, layer 9 is the deepest). Layers 1 and 2 represent the Fowler and Tailings Dam Sandstone (TDSS) formations. Layer 3 represents the Tailings Dam Shale (TDSh), and layers 4 through 9 represent the upper, middle and lower Ore Body Sandstones, and the two aquitards that lie between the upper and middle sands, and the middle and lower sands.

Elevations for the top of layer 2 (top of TDSS) and the top of layer 3 (top of TDSh) were read from ASCII files that were digitized from Figures 1.3 and 1.4 in Water, Waste and Land, 1989. The elevations for the top of layer **I** (the ground surface) were hand-entered into ASCII file format from the two USGS topographic quadrangles that cover the model domain (Whipple Hollow and Bobby Draw). Elevations for the remainder of the model layers were created by subtracting constant thicknesses from the elevations for the top of the TDSh. The values for the thicknesses of the various layers beneath the TDSh were obtained from a generalized geologic cross section of the Site (Figure 12 in "Surface Mine Reclamation Lake Study for Highland Uranium Operations," EPR.81ES.83). For all model layers, the ASCII file elevations were interpolated onto the model grid using a utility included in the Visual MODFLOW software.

Average hydraulic properties were initially assigned to each model layer based upon tests performed in the vicinity of the Site. These tests and the resulting hydraulic data are documented in various Exxon reports (including "Highland Uranium Tailings Impoundment Seepage Study," EPR.5ES.82) and are not repeated here. The hydraulic properties were refined as part of the transient calibration and are discussed in the following section, as are the values used for the initial and boundary conditions, recharge rates and ground water extraction rates..

Section **3.** Transient Calibration

A transient calibration was performed in order to refine the hydraulic properties assigned to the various model layers. The calibration "targets" were the average annual water levels measured in Site monitoring wells from 1989 to 1996.

3.1 Initial and Boundary Conditions

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The initial condition for the transient calibration consisted of average 1988 ground water levels across the Site. The piezometric surface for December, 1988 (Figure 1.6 of Water, Waste and Land, 1989) was digitized into ASCII file format. The ASCII data were read into the model and the model was run for one iteration (not enough to change the heads significantly). The resulting heads for the entire model grid were saved to a file that was later used for the initial heads for each of the transient simulations.

The same ground water elevations were used as the initial condition for each model layer. The year 1988 was selected as the starting point for the transient calibration (as opposed to an earlier year) in order to maximize the amount of well data available to compare with the model results (refer to Table 1, below).

Table 1. Number of Wells Having Water Level Measurements Prior to and Including 1988

A constant head boundary condition was used on the western and eastern edges of the model for most of the model layers. In layers **I** and 2, the western boundary condition was fixed at an elevation of 5200 **ft** above msl. This value was obtained by projecting the average hydraulic gradient at the western edge of piezometric surface maps from 1988 (WWL, 1989) and 1994 (Exxon, 1994) back to the western boundary of the model. The western boundary of layer 3 was fixed at an elevation of 5175 ft above msl. In layers 4 through 9, the western boundary was fixed at a constant head that increased with time, as shown below in Table 2.

Table 2. Values of Time-Varying Western Boundary Condition Assigned to Layers 4 through 9

These values were based on measurements of ground water elevations in the Ore Body Sands in the vicinity of the western boundary of the model. Water levels in the sands were greatly impacted in the early 1980s by underground operations associated with a Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) mine. Since the mid-i 980s, underground operations have ceased at the TVA mine. Recent ground water measurements (January 1997) at wells near the western boundary indicate that water levels in the Ore Body Sands have risen approximately 100 ft. (Range, 1997). These water levels are shown below in Table 3.

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To the east, the TDSS and TDSh outcrop. In the field, the outcrop of the top of the TDSh shows no evidence of ground water seepage. As a result, it can be assumed that the piezometric surface in the TDSS west of the outcrop drops beneath the top of the TDSh before the outcrop occurs. As a result, no eastern boundary condition was defined for model layer 1. In layers 2 and 3, the

eastern boundary does not lie along the eastern edge of the model domain, but instead follows the line of the TDSh outcrop as shown in Figure 2. Ground water elevations along this eastern boundary were set equal to the elevations of the top of layers 2 and 3. All of the nodes to the east of the TDSh outcrop in layers 1 through 3 were defined to be inactive.

The eastern boundary in layers 4 through 9 was located along the eastern edge of the model domain since there was no information regarding outcrops of the Ore Body Sands in this region. Ground water elevations along the eastern boundary in layers 4 through 9 were set equal to an elevation of approximately one foot above the bottom of layer 4.

It should be noted that along the western and eastern boundaries, the head difference above and below layer 3 indicates that the TDSh is believed to be laterally extensive across the model domain and is an effective aquitard. In contrast, the value of the constant head boundary condition is the same in layers 4 through 9 because the Ore Body Sands are believed to be in hydraulic communication across the model domain and the aquitard units between the Ore Body Sands are not laterally extensive.

3.2 Recharge

Three different recharge zones were defined for the model domain, as shown in Figure 3. The first (not explicitly shown in the Figure) was applied to the entire model domain, except those regions shown in color on the Figure. This recharge zone was set at a constant rate of 0.5 inches per year, and represents the amount of rainfall available to infiltrate to ground water after evapotranspiration.

The second recharge zone is shown in green, and lies within the tailings basin outline. Here, the ground water from the extraction wells (discussed below) is discharged into an evaporation pit. The size of the pit is approximately 1.5 acres (the size of two grid blocks in this portion of the model domain), and the amount of recharge assigned to the zone varied from 4.7 inches/year to negative 24 inches/year (a loss of water from the evaporation pit) depending upon the amount of discharge from the wells. Appendix A includes the spreadsheet printout containing the calculations of recharge for the evaporation pit.

Finally, the Reservoir surface, which is shown in blue in Figure 3, was defined as the third recharge zone. For the time period simulated for the transient calibration, it was held constant at a rate of 42.5 inches/year. It was estimated using the water balance shown in Appendix A, which is based upon work performed by Exxon Production Research Company (EPR, 1983). The estimate of 42.5 inches/year indicates that during this time frame, ground water inflow greatly exceeded ground water outflow and evaporation.

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Figure 2. Location of the Eastern Boundary (Shown in Red) in Layers 2 and 3 (Inactive Nodes are Shown in Grey)

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3.3 Ground Water Extraction Wells

As many as five wells have been extracting ground water from the finger zone since 1989. The average annual pumping rate for each of the wells was used in the model to simulate pumping conditions. The average annual pumping rates in gallons per minute (gpm) for the wells are shown below in Table 4 and the location of the wells is shown in Figure 4.

Table 4. Average Annual Ground Water Extraction Rates (in gpm) Used in Model Calibration

3.4 Transient Calibration Results

The results of the transient calibration on a well by well basis are shown in Appendix B. The hydraulic properties assigned to each model layer are summarized below in Table 5. The distribution of hydraulic conductivities and storage properties for each model layer are shown in Figures 5a through 5i. Figure 6 is a map of the simulated and measured piezometric surfaces in the TDSS and mine backfill for average 1996 conditions.

Table 5. Hydraulic Properties Assigned to Calibrated Model Layers

Figure 5a. Hydraulic Conductivities and Storage Properties Assigned to Layer 1

DODS:000 $K_{x,y,z} = .002$ cm/sec $S_s = 00073$ 1/ft $S_v = .15$ 0.01 mm $n = .3$ **ANG ATANG BELIKULAN.** $K_{x,y,z} = .0000005$ cm/sec
S_a = .00022 1/ft $K_{x,y,z} = .000001$ cm/sec **COOCOO** $S_s = 0.0075$ 1/ft $S_v = 0.04$ $K_{x,y,z} = .015$ cm/sec $S_y = .15$ $n = 14$ $S_s = .073$ 1/ft $n = 35$ $S_v = .15$ RZEGIOS $n = .3$ $K_{x,y,z} = 0.008$ cm/sec $S_s = 0.0073$ 1/ft **RESERVE** $K_{x,y,z} = 100$ cm/sec
 $S_s = .99$ 1/ft $S_v = .15$ $n = .3$ $K_{x,y,z} = 1$ cm/sec
S_s = .5 1/ft $S_v = .99$ $n = 99$ Θ (10 $\bar{\Omega}$ $S_y = .99$ -99 $n =$ ğ. HIIITT 油油用用用用用 409500 # 1971 719 $\mathcal{H}_\mathrm{c}^{\mathrm{c}}$, A. H. カセラ公 ${\cal A}_{\rm eff}$ 33.00 n la Citit 推荐证明 2909. 万元 \mathcal{A} \sim NERLAI MODPLOW REALL ON 1995 Exxon Production Research to -(Pleasing) Natarka Hydrogoologic Software Project: Exxon Coal and Minerals $\label{eq:10} S(t) := \mathcal{W} \Theta^{\dagger} = \mathcal{V} \Phi \Theta^{\dagger} = \Theta^{\dagger} \Theta^{\dagger} = \Theta^{\dagger} \Theta^{\dagger} = \mathcal{V} \Theta^{\dagger} \mathcal{V} \Theta^{\dagger}$ Descriptions Figure 5. starped to Gayern 2 Modellan RIA

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Figure 5b. Hydraulic Conductivities and Storage Properties Assigned to Layer 2

Current Layer G

Figure 5c. Hydraulic Conductivities and Storage Properties Assigned to Eager 3

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Figure 5e. Hydraulic Conductivities and Storage Properties Assigned to Layer 5

Figure 5g. Hydraulic Conductivities and Storage Properties Assigned to Layer 7

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Figure 5i. Hydraulic Conductivities and Storage Properties Assigned to Layer 9

Section 4. Long-Term Simulations

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The hydraulic properties, initial condition, and boundary conditions discussed in Section 3 were used to simulate the long-term configuration of the piezometric surface and Highland Reservoir. For the purpose of the long-term simulations, it was assumed that no ground water extraction occurs within the model domain after 1996, and there was no corresponding recharge of the extracted ground water via the evaporation pond. The recharge rate assigned to the Reservoir surface declined to a rate of 0.2 inches/year, based on the assumption that as the Reservoir begins to fill more slowly, ground water outflow exceeds inflow, and the greater surface area of the Reservoir allows for increased evaporation. Refer to Appendix A for the water balance spreadsheet that estimates the net recharge to the Reservoir surface.

The long-term configuration of the piezometric surface in the TDSS and mine backfill is shown in Figure 7. The ultimate level of the Highland Reservoir is predicted to be approximately 5125 **ft** above msl. In general, ground water flows from west to east, with perturbations to this flow regime in the vicinity of the Highland Reservoir and mine backfill. The rate of flow is greatest to the northwest of the Reservoir (approximately **.15** ft/day), and slowest to the northeast of the Reservoir (approximately .05 ft/day). Ground water flow velocities were estimated using an average hydraulic conductivity for the site (.002 cm/sec), and an average site-wide porosity of 34 percent.

In the vicinity of the tailings basin, ground water flows from the northwest to the southeast at a rate of about .03 ft/day, but changes to an easterly flow direction at the eastern edge of the tailings basin. Beneath the northwest portion of the tailings basin, ground water flows from northwest to southeast before the water table drops below the top of the TDSh. Within the TDSh, ground water starts to flow in more of an easterly direction beneath the southeast portion of the tailings basin. As a result, it appears that the portion of the North Fork of the Box Creek that lies to the south and east of the tailings basin will not intercept ground water migrating from beneath the basin. Ground water flow velocities were estimated using an average hydraulic conductivity for the site (.002 cm/sec), and an average site-wide porosity of 34 percent.

4.1 Sensitivity Analyses

Sensitivity analyses were performed in order to determine the degree of uncertainty in the model results based upon uncertainty in the model input parameters. All sensitivity analyses, except those performed on the value of specific storage, were performed as steady state simulations in order to greatly reduce the computational effort required.

Figure 7. Long-Term Configuration of the Piezometric Surface in the TDSS and Mine Backfill

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Hydraulic Conductivity

The values of the hydraulic conductivities assigned to the model layers were increased and then decreased **by** an order of magnitude in order to evaluate the sensitivity of the final Reservoir elevation to the values used. In general, an order of magnitude change in hydraulic conductivity in any of the layers resulted in a change in ultimate Reservoir elevation of about **15%** or less. For most of the layers, the change in Reservoir elevation was less than 10% (a 10% change is approximately **15** feet). The Reservoir elevation was most sensitive to the hydraulic conductivity assigned to model layers 1 and 4.

Recharge

The values assigned to the two recharge zones (the areal recharge zone and the zone assigned to the Reservoir surface) used in the steady state simulation were changed to determine the sensitivity of the ultimate Reservoir elevation to the values used. For the first sensitivity analysis, the recharge assigned to the entire model domain was increased from **0. 5** inches/year to **1. 5** inches/year. This change had a negligible impact (approximately **3%)** on the ultimate Reservoir elevation. For the second sensitivity analysis, the Reservoir evaporation rate was increased from 0.2 inches/year to **-50** inches/year. This also had a negligible impact (it resulted in a decline of less than **3%)** on the ultimate Reservoir elevation.

Boundary Conditions

The boundary conditions were modified in order to evaluate the sensitivity of the final Reservoir elevation to the values assigned. In layers 1 through **3,** the western boundary condition was decreased **by** 20 **ft.** This resulted in a negligible (approximately **3%)** decline in the ultimate Reservoir elevation. **A** 20 **ft** increase in the western boundary condition for layers 1 through **3** also resulted in an increase in Reservoir elevation of about **3%.**

For layers 4 through **9,** the western boundary condition was increased from **5125** to **5150 ft** above msl. This resulted in an almost **7%** increase in the ultimate Reservoir elevation. **A** corresponding decrease in the boundary condition for layers 4 through **9** was not made, since current water level measurements are at or below 5125 feet above msl, and while it is believed that the ground water system in these layers may continue to rebound slightly, water levels are not expected to decline.

To the east, the boundary condition in layers 2 and **3** was lowered **by 10** feet in order to evaluate the impact on the ultimate Reservoir elevation. The resulting Reservoir elevation was essentially the same (a less than 2% decline) as the original elevation. In layers 4 through **9,** the eastern boundary conditions were increased **by** 20 feet. This resulted in a less than 2% increase in the ultimate Reservoir elevation simulated **by** the model.

Specific Storage

Out of necessity, the sensitivity analyses performed on specific storage were performed as transient simulations. The computational effort required was significant and limited the number of analyses that could be performed to two. The first sensitivity analysis performed was on the value of specific storage and specific yield used in layers 1 and 2. Here, the specific storage was increased by two orders of magnitude, and specific yield was increased 33%. The result was a less than 7% decrease in the ultimate Reservoir elevation.

The second sensitivity analysis was on the value of specific storage used in the model layers that correspond to the Ore Body Sands and the aquitards between the sands (layers 4 through **9).** Again, the specific storage was increased by two orders of magnitude (the specific yield was also increased by 33%). The resulting Reservoir elevation was approximately 13% lower. While the model results are certainly more sensitive to the value of specific storage used in layers 4 through 9 as opposed to layers 1 and 2, the change can still be considered to be rather minimal when compared to the overall rise in water level in the Reservoir.

Section 5. References

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APPENDIX A

CALCULATION SPREADSHEETS

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Calc, ion of net recharge from evaporation pond

EXXPOND.XLS

Calculation of net recharge at Reservoir surface.

APPENDIX B

TRANSIENT CALIBRATION RESULTS

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TRAN15 Chart 84

WELL 172

Page 1

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WATER ELEV. 5105 -
5100 -5095 5090 5085 APPROX. BOTTOM OF TDSS $5080 +$ 2/6/1992 2/4/1998 2/6/1990 2/5/1994 2/5/1996 2/7/1988

APPENDIX 5

COMPARISON OF EPRCO PREDICTIONS WITH ACTUAL WATER QUALITY RESULTS

WHAT EPRCO DID

EPRCO developed geologic, hydrologic and solute transport models for the tailings basin area. The geologic model was based on drill hole data and core samples. The hydrologic model was based on the geologic model and hydrologic tests of monitor wells and core samples. The solute transport model was based on the first two models and geochemical testing including column leach tests of tailings liquid through geologic media, titration tests of tailings liquid, and contact tests between geologic media and tailings liquid.

In preparing the solute transport model, Distribution Coefficients and Relative Velocities for the various solutes were developed (Table 20 of EPRCO, 1982). The Relative Velocities compare the solute front velocity to the fluid velocity. According to the EPRCO report, the solute front was considered to be the point at which the solute concentration was half of the tailings fluid concentration. Solution pH was handled slightly differently as the pH front was considered to be at the point at which the pH had dropped to 5, a pH value that is about midway between the tailings fluid pH and background.

EPRCO prepared Figures 56 through 60 (Table 20 of EPRCO, 1982) that showed the expected horizontal distribution of solutes in the TDSS at relative solute velocities from a ratio of 1.0 to 0.1 of the fluid velocity.

COMPARISON OF DATA TO EPRCO MODEL PREDICTIONS

In general it appears EPRCO slightly overpredicted the movement of Potentially Hazardous Constituents (PHCs) in most directions. PHC movement through the TDSS has only exceeded EPRCO predictions to the west. In this direction the mine backfill strongly attenuates the effects. Comparisons for specific constituents with the EPRCO model results follow.

Cadmium:

The cadmium Relative Velocity was predicted to be 1.0, and the tailings fluid cadmium concentration was about 0.08 mg/I, resulting in a predicted seepage front concentration of 0.04 mg/I versus the GPL of 0.01. The NRC sample of tailings fluid in 1986 contained 0.12 mg/I for a seepage front concentration of 0.06 mg/I, versus the GPL of 0.01. By the time the NRC collected samples, the tailings liquid had experienced a good deal of evaporation without the introduction of new tailings fluid, so the solute concentrations were probably well above those typical during most of the life of the tailings basin. The EPRCO model apparently over predicted the extent of cadmium movement as none of the TDSS wells reached 0.04 mg/I and measurements are now below the GPL, whereas EPRCO predicted the solute front for a Relative Velocity of 1.0 would be well outside the perimeter of the tailings basin by 1992 (See Figure 56 of EPRCO, 1982).

Chloride:

Although not measured in laboratory tests, EPRCO expected a chloride Relative Velocity of 1.0. The tailings fluid chloride concentration was about 220 mg/I for a seepage front concentration of 110 mg/I. There is no GPL. The chloride front is beyond the EPRCO model prediction for 1992 to the west, south and north, but is about where the EPRCO model predicted it would be to the east. The chloride front does appear to be shrinking.

Chromium:

The chromium Relative Velocity was predicted to be 0.01, and the tailings fluid chromium concentration was about 0.03 mg/I, resulting in a predicted seepage front concentration of 0.015 mg/I versus the GPL of 0.05 mg/l. The NRC sample of tailings fluid in 1986 contained 2.4 mg/I, which corresponds to a seepage front concentration of 1.2 mg/I versus the GPL of 0.05. The EPRCO model under predicted the chromium movement to the west as it existed in 1989- 1991 and perhaps slightly over predicted it to the south in 1989-1991. The monitoring data matches the EPRCO model prediction in the other directions. However, this is somewhat academic as the chromium concentrations have fallen to below the GPL at all the monitor wells. EPRCO speculated that the discharge of tailings in the west end of the tailings basin in the middle 1970s caused solute concentrations in this direction in excess of the model predictions which were based on seepage only occurring from the main pool of liquid in the tailings basin. It can be speculated that this western discharge caused the elevated chromium values found in Wells 114 and 175 in 1988-1990. The strong attenuation of chromium implied by the chromium Distribution Coefficient and Relative Velocity could explain why it disappeared from solution a few years after the tailings pool had evaporated.

Nickel:

The nickel Relative Velocity was predicted to be 1.0 in an acidic environment, but nickel is pH sensitive - not moving faster than the pH front. The tailings fluid nickel concentration was about 1.1 mg/I resulting in a predicted seepage front concentration of 0.55 mg/I versus the GPL of 0.02 mg/I. The NRC sample of tailings fluid in 1986 contained 3.5 mg/I for a seepage front concentration of 1.8 mg/I versus the GPL of 0.02. The nickel front is about where the EPRCO model predicted. The EPRCO pH prediction shows progressively smaller outward increments of movement over time. This perhaps reflects the finate quantity of low pH fluid from the tailings basin meeting a growing perimeter of alkaline rock as the front spreads. This would indicate the front would finally stop moving with all the low pH fluid neutralized.

pH:

The pH (hydrogen cation) Relative Velocity was predicted to be 0.5 in the TDSS, and the tailings fluid pH Was about 2.4 with a seepage front value of 5. There is no GPL. The pH front was only predicted to reach wells to the southeast of the tailings basin and to the edges of the basin to the east and north. The pH measurements have declined below background in these directions and to the west. The EPRCO model appears to have over predicted the total decline in pH that would occur in that the lowest pH observed has been 5.7 at well 114. The pH is

generally consistent with the other parameters in that the movement to the west of the lowered pH zone has been slightly more pronounced than the model predicted.

Radium-226:

The radium-226 Relative Velocity was predicted to be 0.01, and the tailings fluid radium-226 concentration was about 70 pCi/I, resulting in a predicted seepage front concentration of 35 pCi/I. There is no specific GPL for radium-226, but the radium-226+228 GPL is 5 pCi/l. Some individual wells have occasionally exhibited radium-226 results above 5 pCi/I. Given that the wells at the western end of the tailings basin have not generally had elevated concentrations, contrary to the norm for other solutes, and the very low predicted Relative Velocity of radium, it definitely appears that the occasional elevated radium-226 results at other wells are localized due to specific geochemical circumstances near specific wells rather than the result of tailings seepage. EPRCO did not model radium-228, which is the principle radium radionuclide found at Wells 114 and 175 at the west end of the tailings basin.

Selenium:

The selenium Relative Velocity was predicted to be 0.016, and the tailings fluid selenium concentration was about 0.126 mg/I, resulting in a predicted seepage front concentration of 0.063 mg/I versus the GPL of 0.05. The NRC sample of tailings fluid in 1986 contained 0.77 mg/I for a seepage front concentration of 0.38 mg/I versus the GPL of 0.05. Only well 112 regularly exceeds the detection limit of 0.001 mg/I. The concentration at well 112 is usually above 0.1 mg/I. Given that the wells at the western end of the tailings basin have not had elevated concentrations, contrary to the norm for other solutes, and the very low predicted Relative Velocity of selenium, it definitely appears that the elevated selenium results at Well 112 are a localized event due to specific geochemical circumstances near the well rather than the result of tailings seepage.

Sodium:

The sodium Relative Velocity was predicted to be 1.0, and the tailings fluid sodium concentration was about 260 mg/I, resulting in a predicted seepage front concentration of 130 mg/I. There is no GPL for sodium. The NRC sample of tailings fluid in 1986 contained 630 mg/I for a seepage front concentration of 320 mg/l. The EPRCO model somewhat under predicted the extent of sodium movement in all directions. This would indicate the EPRCO hydrologic model somewhat under predicted the fluid velocity in all directions.

Sulfate:

The sulfate Relative Velocity was predicted to be 1.0, and the tailings fluid sulfate concentration was about 7580 mg/I, resulting in a predicted seepage front concentration of 3790 mg/I. There is no GPL. The EPRCO model over predicted the extent of sulfate movement in all direction except to the west where the model under predicted the movement. The discharge of tailings in the west end of the basin during much of the 1970s probably explains this under prediction to the west by the model.

Thorium-230:

The thorium-230 Relative Velocity was predicted to be 0.094, and the tailings fluid thorium-230 concentration was about 31,000 pCi/I, resulting in a predicted seepage front concentration of 15,500 pCi/I versus the GPL of 0.55 pCi/I. The EPRCO model correctly predicted virtually no movement of this solute from the tailings basin.

Natural Uranium:

Uranium-238 accounts for about half of the radioactivity in natural uranium. The uranium-238 Relative Velocity was predicted to be 0.104. The tailings fluid natural uranium concentration was about 5,000 pCi/I, resulting in a predicted seepage front concentration of 2,500 pCi/I versus the GPL of 0.43 pCi/I. The EPRCO model predicted the uranium seepage front would only emerge out of the basin to the south edge. No measurements have approached 2,500 pCi/I at the TDSS monitor wells, but the highest concentrations have been at wells 117 and 177 in the southerly direction.

Summary:

The conditions within the TDSS surrounding the tailings basin are much like those EPRCO predicted fifteen years ago would exist at this tiime. Discrepancies from the model are relatively minor.

From the sodium data it appears the EPRCO hydrologic model slightly under predicted the seepage fluid velocity. For most solutes the model under predicted movement to the west. EPRCO discussed this in the report and concluded it was a result of tailings disposal in the western end of the basin that created a secondary source of seepage into the Fowler formation and the TDSS apart from the main pool of tailings liquid. The impact of this secondary source of seepage is limited to the monitor wells at the west end of the tailings basin and has had no significant impact on the mine backfill or Highland Reservoir water quality due to the strong attenuation of the mixture of sands and shales in the backfill.

The EPRCO model tended to Over predict movement of PHCs in all directions but to the west. Given the predominant current western flow of ground water from the tailings area towards the mine backfill, significant further movement of solutes in any other direction is not expected in the future. The TDSS in the tailings area will probably be totally drained before the Highland Reservoir water level is high enough to begin resaturating the TDSS.

APPENDIX 5.DOC

APPENDIX 6

A COMPREHENSIVE RISK ASSESSMENT

FOR THE

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL LIMITS

AT THE PROPOSED POINTS OF EXPOSURE

FOR

NICKEL, RADIUM, AND URANIUM

AT THE

HIGHLAND RECLAMATION PROJECT

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- 1.4 Dose Conversion Factors and Exposure Pathways
- 1.5 Ground Water Concentrations
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This assessment of risk was prepared in support of an application for alternate concentration limits. Ground water monitoring indicates that the concentrations of nickel, radium, and uranium exceed background concentrations at some Point of Compliance (POC) locations.

To determine the risk associated with water use at the Points of Exposure (POEs) with the ALARA concentrations to nickel, radium, and uranium at the **POC,** a residential use scenario was assumed to exist. Although there is no current use of the affected water resource and none is expected, this conservative approach was utilized. The typical 70 kg individual over a 70-year life span was assumed to consume 2 liters of water per day and eat vegetables irrigated with the predicted water quality.

Carcinogenic risks were determined for nickel, radium, and uranium. Additionally, noncarcinogenic hazard quotients were determined for these constituents. All of the hazard quotients were found to be less than unity; consequently, the toxic effects of the assessed constituents were found to be acceptable.

The carcinogenic risks for individual constituents were assessed. The risk associated with radium and uranium were found to be within an acceptable range, being less than E-4. The risk associated with nickel was found to be on the order of E-3 as was the total risk associated with all of the assessed constituents.

To determine the incremental increase in risk due to the reclaimed mill tailings, the risk associated with consumption of water having background concentrations of nickel, radium, and uranium was calculated. The assessment of total risk associated with the background conditions indicated nickel risks on the order of E-3, while radium and uranium were on the order of E-5. The addition of the measured concentrations of nickel, radium, and uranium at the POEs, were minimal and did not change the risk order of magnitude.

The exposure assessment indicated that there is no exposed population and it is reasonable to assume that there will be no-future exposed population. However to support the calculation of risk, a hypothetical population was assumed to exist. The scenario demonstrated that the total risk associated with the utilization of background water concentrations was essentially the same as the risk associated with the measured water quality at the POEs.

1.0 HUMAN HEALTH **EVALUATION**

1.1 Introduction

This document evaluates the potential risks to human health associated with water use at the POE locations east and west of the Highland tailings basin. The risk assessment is based on the United States Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Risk Assessment Guidance for Superfund, Vol. 1 Human Health Evaluation Manual (Part A and B) 1989 (RAGS). Other sources of information used in this risk assessment are the EPA Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS), the Health Effects Assessment Summary Tables (HEAST), and the Federal Guidance Report Number 11: Limiting Values of Radionuclide Intake and Air Concentration and Dose Conversion Factors for Inhalation, Submersion, and Ingestion, Table 2.2.

The NRC selected four wells as POCs. These are on the north, east, south and west sides of the tailings basin. One ACL is sought for the east side. Three are sought for the west side. None is sought for the north side since the north **POC** is in compliance with the NRC set Groundwater Protection Limits (GPLs) established in the license. The south POC well is now dry but is expected to be resaturated in the future, so one ACL is sought for this currently dry well.

For the east and south sides, only uranium ACLs are needed. For the west side nickel and radium 226 + 228 ACLs are sought. This risk assessment is by POE with assessments performed for each POE associated with a POC well for which an ACL is needed.

East of the east **POC** well the uppermost aquifer is dry and will not be resaturated in the future. Therefore no POE will exist east of the **POC** well.

West of the west **POC** well lies Highland Reservoir. One well (Well 180) exists between the west **POC** well, Well 175 and Highland Reservoir, but this one well is dry. Highland Reservoir is an obvious POE. It serves as the POE for all concentrations other than uranium and selenium. Since the reservoir lies in a mined-out uranium open pit mine, it contains uranium and selenium concentrations much higher than those found in the tailings basin monitor wells.

1.2 Selection of Hazardous Constituents for Risk Evaluation

Information collected from monitoring of the corrective action program (CAP) was utilized to determine the parameters for risk evaluation. The monitoring data indicate that nickel, radium 226+228 (radium), and uranium will require alternate concentration limits and an evaluation of risk at the POE locations.

The monitoring information indicates that although other potentially hazardous constituents are present in the water found in the upper most acquifier, the concentrations are below the license-established limits. Evaluation of past concentrations, current concentrations and the EPRCO 1973 Seepage Study indicate that they will remain below the license-established limits in the future.

1.3 Toxicity Information for Noncarcinogenic and Carcinogenic Effects

The toxicity information used in this risk assessment, to evaluate noncarcinogenic doseresponse effects, was acquired from IRIS and HEAST. The Reference Dose (RfD) was the primary parameter utilized for noncarcinogenic effects through ingestion routes of exposure. Exposures were assumed to be chronic exposures, lasting between seven years and a 70-year lifetime. Nickel has a RfD, but the radioisotopes do not have RfD values. The RfD for nickel is given in Table 1.3.1 and was utilized as a measure of the health efforts associated with nickel. The primary health effect associated with radium and uranium is from radioisotope exposure and the resulting potential for cancer.

The EPA assumes that there is essentially no level of exposure to a carcinogenic chemical that does not pose a finite possibility, no matter how small, of generating a carcinogenic response. In evaluating carcinogenic effects, no threshold value can be assumed. The EPA uses a two-part evaluation in which the substance is first assigned a weight-of-evidence classification, (defined by the EPA as a plausible upper-bound estimate of the probability of a response per unit intake of a chemical over a 70-year lifetime). Following this a slope factor is calculated. This value is multiplied by the chronic daily intake of the chemical to produce an estimate of probability of an individual developing cancer due to exposure to that chemical.

Exposure to radioisotopes requires that the slope factor be multiplied by. the chronic daily intake, which has been modified by the dose conversion factor (DCF). These calculations were carried out for nickel, radium, and uranium. Slope factors and weightof-evidence classifications for these constituents are included in Table 1.3.1.

Table 1.3.1 Toxicity Values for Hazardous Constituents.

There are inherent uncertainties in the toxicity data used to assess risk in this, and any other evaluation. For instance, using dose-response information from effects observed at high doses to predict the health effects that may occur following exposure to the low levels of hazardous constituents concentrations introduces uncertainties. Similarly, using animal studies to predict human response and the use of short-term studies to predict the effects of 70-year life-time exposure add to the uncertainties.

Experimental studies of animal populations coupled with studies of healthy human populations are used to predict the response likely to be observed in a population consisting of individuals with a wide range of sensitivities.

Uncertainty factors which may overestimate potential risk, and are used to calculate risk, are presented along with toxicity values in Table 1.3.1. These values give an indication of the confidence in experimental data used to determine the associated RfD. The greater the uncertainly factor, the greater the uncertainly associated with the experimental data.

1.4 Dose Conversions Factors and Exposure Pathways

Dose Conversions Factors (DCF) are utilized to more accurately determine the radiation dosage due to the presence of the radionuclide in a given matrix. These DCFs are not utilized in the determination of risk of developing cancer, but instead are used to determine the effective dose intake associated with the concentration of radionuclide in the matrix, the frequency of dosage, and the duration of dosage.

This assessment considered risk to future populations at each POE for which an ACL is sought. Ground water with the nickel, radium, and uranium concentrations predicted to be present at these points were assumed to the utilized by humans. The exposure matrix assumed that water at the POEs would be a drinking water source and would nourish consumable food products. Intake of hazardous constituents as a result of exposure to contaminated soils was not considered, as there are no contaminated soils at the site. Similarly, dermal exposure was not considered a probable exposure pathway and not included in the assessment.

1.5 Ground Water Concentrations

The POE concentrations of nickel, radium, and uranium were used in this risk assessment. The POE locations are established at the down-gradient edge of the land mass that will accompany an amendment application for a General license. Consequently, this land mass is the minimal amount of land that is necessary to assure long-term control of the reclaimed byproduct materials. Information on the concentration of nickel, radium and uranium are shown in Table 1.5.1.

Table 1.5.1 Potentially Hazardous Constituents Concentration at POE Locations

*Four samplings of Well 182 in 1988.

The values for nickel, radium, and uranium shown in Table 1.5.1 indicate that risk was assessed for concentrations that represent the entire range of hazardous constituents that have occurred The risk for nickel Was assessed for the background concentration of 0.02 mg/I as well as the actual maximum concentration of 0.02 mg/I to demonstrate the minimal incremental increases in risk associated with this concentration of nickel. Similarly, the background concentrations of radium and uranium as well as the POE maximum measured concentrations were assessed for risk.

1.6 Future Land Use

Although no exposed populations currently exist at the Highland site and none are predicted to be in the area in the future, residential land use was considered in the risk assessment. Lesser exposure scenarios would have resulted in no exposed populations. Although this is the likely scenario, it is inconsistent with the **ACL** guidance document. Exposure pathways considered for future populations include ingestion of contaminated ground water. Additionally, consumption of produce using contaminated ground water for irrigation, assuming that water will be ingested from Vegetable and fruits grown at residences. Table 1.6.1 summarized the potential for exposure to future residents across all routes of exposure.

Table 1.6.1 Potentially Exposed Populations and Exposure Routes

1.7 Quantification of Potential Risk

The quantification of risk utilized standard EPA equations and the methodology as discussed in RAGS, 1989. Included in this subsection are explanations of the calculations, which were performed for each pathway. The equations that were utilized are shown below.

Intake of nickel by ingestion of ground water was calculated by using the following equation:

> CW X IR X EF X ED Intake $(mq/kq-dav)$ = BW X AT

Where:

Intake of nickel due to ingestion of home-grown produce irrigated with POE ground. water was calculated by using the following equation:

$$
CF X IR X FI X EF X EE
$$

Intake (mg/kg-day) =
$$
BW X AT
$$

Where:

For calculation of intake of the radioisotopes, averaging time (AT) and body weight (BW) were deleted and the resulting intake was multiplied by the dose conversion factor (DCF). This conversion provided a more accurate estimation of radiation dosage due to the consumption of POE ground water and ingestion of POE irrigated home-grown produce. The units of intake are therefore discussed in terms of effective dose and expressed as fractions of radiation equivalent man (rem).

1.8 Risk Characterization

The carcinogenic and noncarcinogenic risks associated with exposure to nickel, radium, and uranium under the residential future land use scenario serve as the characterization for this assessment. Although there is no current indication that the ground water will be utilized under a residential scenario, this type of use was assumed to take place. This use scenario incorporates the most conservative exposure values (i.e., length of residence, duration of exposure, etc.)

If exposure to nickel, radium, and uranium under this land use scenario demonstrates no increase in risk of developing cancer and non-cancer illnesses, then it will be the case for all other land use scenarios.

A lifetime exposure of 70 years was assumed. Due to this, children and adults were not assessed separately, because the 70-year lifetime encompassed both childhood and adulthood. The exposure pathways under the residential land use scenario include the

ingestion of POE ground water and the ingestion of home-grown produce irrigated with POE ground water. The intake of potentially carcinogenic chemicals by residents is summarized in Table 1.8.1.

The potential risk for residents to develop cancer, from the predicted nickel concentrations in the ground water, is provided by the product of the slope factor and the intake, and expressed in (mg/kg-day). The potential risk to residents to develop cancer from radium and uranium is determined by the product of the estimated ingested activity (in pCi; not utilizing the **DCF)** and the slope factor (risk/pCi). The potential risk for residents to develop cancer due to exposure to site contaminants is summarized in Table 1.8.2.

Table 1.8.2 Potentially Carcinogenic Risks to Residents

The potential risk for residents to develop a non-cancer illness due to chronic exposure to nickel is summarized in Table 1.8.3. Radium and uranium are not considered in this portion of the assessment, because they are detailed in Table 1.8.2.

Table 1.8.3 Noncarcinogenic Hazard Quotients for Residents

An overall assessment of the risk of developing cancer or a non-cancer illness due to exposure to nickel, radium, and uranium was conducted. The assessment utilized the residential land use scenario and combined risks and HQs across all pathways. Summing the risks and HQs over all pathways produces a very conservative representation of the risks.

In order for the estimated cancer risk to fall within EPA guidelines for acceptable risk, the risk from an individual chemical should be less than 1E-6, and the combined cancer risk across all pathways from all chemicals should be less than 1E-4. This differs from the ACL guidance, which allows a 1E-4 risk for any individual constituent.

According to the same EPA guidelines, the risk for contracting a non-cancer illness (described by the HQ) from an individual chemical, and combined for all chemicals across all pathways, should be less than one. The HQs for individual chemicals and the sum of HQs for all chemicals across all pathways should be less than one. For the individual and combined hazard quotients to be acceptable, they must be less than one.

The total risk for residents to develop cancer across an individual pathway is summarized in Table 1.8.4.

Table 1.8.4 Total Risk of Developing Cancer for Residents

The HQ is obtained by dividing the intake of nickel (units of mg/kg-day) by the RfD for nickel (units of mg/kg-day). A summary of chronic HQs across each exposure pathway is given in Table 1.8.5.

The overall risk for individuals residing at the POE locations to develop cancer is 5.3E-4 in the Western flow path, 5.9 E-7 in the Southern flow path and 6.3E-5 in the Eastern flow path. The use of water at the background concentrations results in an overall risk to develop cancer of 5.2E-4.

The overall risk for individuals residing at the western POE for nickel to develop a noncancer illness is 0.03. Because these values are well below the EPA risk levels, noncancer illness was not assessed for utilization of water at the background concentration.

The calculations indicate that all hazard quotients are well below recommended levels. Therefore, they are not a contributor to the overall risk. The driving factor for risk is the predicted development of cancer due to the presence of nickel in the background water as well as in the water predicted to reside in the Western POE flow path.

1.9 Uncertainties in the Characterization of Risk

There are uncertainties inherent in calculating the risk of developing cancer and noncancer illnesses due to exposure to nickel, radium, and uranium. Included are the sitespecific uncertainly factors associated with characterizing the physical setting, and determining the fate and transport, as well as toxicity.

The physical setting of the reclaimed tailings are located in a remote section of central Wyoming. The land use is limited to cattle grazing. There is no reason to believe that the land use will change; however, the **ACL** guidance document requires that a residential land use be assumed for the risk assessment.

The exposure pathways (ingestion of POE groundwater and ingestion of home-grown produce irrigated by POE water) were chosen for evaluation based upon the **ACL** guidance document. Again, there is little or no chance of this taking place, within the foreseeable future.

No risk assessment modeling information was used in performing this risk assessment. Rather, the concentrations of nickel, radium and uranium measured at a background location as well as the concentrations of these constituents measured at the POE locations were utilized in the risk assessment.

Significant site data gaps occur when site specific data is unavailable or unknown. This specifically occurs when estimating the exposure to future populations. This risk assessment follows the guidance of RAGS when determining these unknown values. For example, when estimating what the exposure to a future resident will be, there are no current resident upon which to base the estimates of exposure parameters; therefore, the EPA recommended values have been used to estimate exposure to residents. When several options are available, the most conservative value was utilized.

Similarly, conservative values for the ingestion of home-grown produce, 250 mg/meal, for one meal per day have been used for the intake calculation. Using the most conservation values leads to a potential over estimation of risk.

A certain amount of uncertainly exists with the slope values and references doses that were used in the calculation of risk. These values were obtained from EPA sources. These references acknowledge the uncertainly associated with the lack of human or animal data and the extrapolation that is necessary. These uncertainty factors probably overestimate the calculated risk.

2.0 Conclusions

The EPS RAGS methodology was implemented in this risk assessment. The objective of this assessment was to assess the degree of risk associated with future residential

land use at the POE locations. The assessment assumed that the maximum predicted concentrations would be realized at the POE locations. The exposure routes included ingestion of POE ground water and ingestion of home-grown vegetables irrigated with POE ground water.

Under a residential land use scenario, the overall risk across all pathways for residents to develop cancer was evaluated at the POE locations. The risk exceeds 1E-4 limit for cumulative pathways. Exceeding this value is primarily a function of nickel. However, it is important to note that the risk associated with use of background ground water also exceeds the **I** E-4 limit. The uranium and nickel GPLs are based on Highland background data. The radium limit is the EPA MCL for drinking water.

The concentrations of uranium and radium in the ground water at the POEs will cause a minimal increase in the risk of cancer to future residents, primarily from the ingestion of ground water. Risks of developing cancer from ingesting ground water containing uranium are 5.3E-5 and 4.9E-7 in the Eastern flow path and the Southern flow path, respectively. Corresponding radium value is 4.2E-5 for the West flow path. All of these risks are within acceptable ACL guidance levels. The predicted risk values for uranium in home-grown produce are 1.OE-5 and 1.OE-7 for the Eastern and Southern flow paths, respectively.

The predicted risk value for radium in home-grown produce is 2.1 E-6 for the West flow path. Again, these values are within the range specified in the ACL guidance. No pathways or risk levels exceed a 1E-6 level for developing a non-cancer illness.

The exposure estimates for the exposure pathways were determined-by using the most conservative values recommended by the EPA. They represent the worst-case scenario and likely overestimate the actual exposure.

The reviewer should note that the EPA has issued, based upon recent data, a maximum concentration limit for nickel in drinking water of 0.1 mg/I with an oral reference dose (RFD) of 2E-2 mg/kg/day. The model predicted levels of nickel at the POEs would represent about one-fifth of this limit. The carcinogenic risk based scenario is based upon data collected in relation to airborne particulate inhalation of "nickel refinery dust and specific nickel compounds - nickel carbonyl and nickel subsulfide". The application of this risk to soluble nickel in ground water is certainly conservative.

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APPENDIX 7

Updated and Expanded Review Of Potential Corrective Action Programs (ALARA DEMONSTRATION)

The Corrective Action Program (CAP) was instituted to improve the quality of water in the TDSS around the tailings basin and to prevent unacceptable impacts at Points of Exposure (POEs). The TDSS is not a significant aquifer at Highland. Deeper, thicker, much more productive aquifers exist and were developed for potable and process water for the Highland uranium operations. No livestock or other uses of TDSS water were in place within a mile of the tailings basin before mining began. These same deeper aquifers exist around the tailings basin.

Well 175, the most productive well in the TDSS once had a maximum sustainable yield of 3 gallons per minute. This has been declining as the aquifer continues to drain. Wells in the deeper aquifer had sustained yields that are ten times greater.

In order to put an upper value on the lengths society will go to gain useable water, desalinization projects were reviewed. Santa Barbara, California contracted to have a plant to deal with drought emergencies. The contracted cost of water was \$1,100 per acre-foot in 1995 (www.ci.santa-barbara.ca.us/wresourc/bfsupply.htm#Desal), equal to \$3,400 per million gallons. A proposal for Pinellas County, Florida estimated \$1300 to \$2200 per million gallons (www.enviroworld.com/March97/030597.html#anchor786456). These put an upper limit on water resources of less than \$5000 per million gallons. The finger area south of the tailings basin contained about 39 million gallons of producible water in 1996 that the CAP seeks to replace with more useable water. At \$5000 per million gallons that water would have a perceived value up to \$0.2 million, assuming the source was next to a city in great need of a water supply.

Following the CAP has resulted in pumping and evaporating about 16 million gallons of liquid from the uppermost aquifer during the nearly nine years of operation. If the CAP is shut down at this time, there is sufficient attenuation capacity between the point of compliance (POC) wells and the point of exposures (POEs) to attenuate the Potentially Hazardous Constituents (PHCs) and continue to maintain the levels of PHCs at acceptable risk levels at the POEs. (See Hazard Assessment section of this document.)

The CAP has substantially reduced the mass of potentially hazardous constituents in the uppermost aquifer. A graph of the annual cost per 1,000 gallons of ground water recovered associated with the CAP program is attached as Figure 1. The annual cost have increased sharply during the last four years due to low well yields caused by decreasing head. To date ECMC has spent \$0.6 million on a water supply worth a maximum of \$0.2 million.

Several options were considered to try to further reduce the concentrations of potentially hazardous constituents to levels that would be as low as reasonably achievable taking into consideration the cost of the options versus the expected change in constituent concentration at the POEs.

OPTION 0. End Current Corrective Action Program

This includes what has already been accomplished as discussed in the Corrective Action Assessment in the main body of this report. Some 16 million gallons has been pumped from the uppermost aquifer at a cost of \$0.6 million dollars or about \$34 thousand/million gallons over a period of nine years. During that time, most of the PHC concentrations have fallen below the GPLs. Operating this program now costs about \$50 thousand per year.

OPTION 1. Continue Current Corrective Action Program

The impact of continuing the current CAP until all of the recoverable solution has been removed from the tailings was estimated. This option leaves no useable water in the uppermost aquifer - it will be dry.

The cost versus benefit was determined using the following information:

a) Recoverable volume in the uppermost aquifer in the area of elevated potentially hazardous constituents is 13 million gallons. (Estimated volume equals 34% of the 39 million gallons in the finger area by 1996 less 1.6 million gallons recovered in 1997- 1998. Between 1989 and 1996 the finger area drainable liquid volume declined from 80 million gallons to 39 million gallons. The mitigation system recovered 34% of the reduction. The other 66% drained to the mine backfill.).

b) Rate of recovery is 1.1 million gallons per year, based upon the most recent dewatering rates, gradually declining to less than 0.2 millions gallons per year in about twenty years. (See Figure 6)

c) Total cost would be at least one million dollars over a 20-year period. The present mitigation system costs about \$50 thousand per year to operate. The total treatment cost for the finger area water would rise to \$1.6 million versus the \$0.2 million maximum worth of the water.

d) The minimum cost estimate would be \$77 thousand /million gallons of solution recovered and evaporated.

e) POE Well 125 would be essentially dry in 20 years. (See Figure 7.) It will probably go dry or nearly dry over this time frame whether pumping continues or not. Well 177 is already dry. The 1998 EPRCO study in Appendix 3 indicates the TDSS at this well will be permanently dry when steady state conditions are reached. The study did not predict the timing for this state to occur.

f) The concentration of Ni and Ra 226 + 228 in Highland Reservoir would not change. Ni and Ra 228 are already not detectable. Ra 226 has average 4 pCi/I since 1990 versus 0.8 at Well 175. The higher Ra 226 concentration in the reservoir is probably the result of natural mineralization around the lake perimeter.

g) The nickel and Ra 226 + 228 concentrations at Well 175 would not change but the well would be nearly dry. This is based on having removed the entire drainable volume of the TDSS in the finger area by that time. This will occur in nearly the same time frame

with or without pumping given that drainage to the mine backfill accounted for two-thirds of the reduced drainable liquid volume in the finger area over the past decade.

There are uncertainties associated with this option. Well 175 yields most of the water produced. Pump maintenance at this well is increasing each year with iron scaling becoming progressively worse. This may reduce the annual volume that can be practically taken from the well.

OPTION 2. Treated Water, Ground Water Sweep

Pumping and reinjection of treated uppermost aquifer water was also considered as a ground water corrective action plan. This plan could utilize an expanded system of wells as described in Ground Water Remedial Action Alternative Number 12.1 in Appendix B (WWL, 1989). This option leaves 37 million gallons of water in the aquifer that could be used at a cost of \$73 thousand per million gallons.

The cost versus benefit was determined using the following assumptions:

a) The volume of recoverable solution that would be treated would be 37 million gallons over a period of five years. This is the entire drainable volume within the finger area in 1996, less the 1997-1998 water production and assuming no seepage escaping to the mine backfill since 1996 and throughout the five years - clearly an unrealistic assumption.

b) The rate of recovery is estimated at 7.4 million gallons per year.

c) The cost of the system including wells, operation and maintenance would be about \$2.7M or \$73,000/million gallons of solution treated. The total treatment cost including the current corrective action plan would rise to \$3.3 million versus the \$0.2 million maximum value of the water.

d) The water quality in Highland Reservoir would not change. The Ni, Ra 226 + 288 and U concentrations at wells 125, 175 and 177 would decline by about one third. This is based on replacing the entire drainable volume of the TDSS in the finger area with clean water that would mix with the two-thirds of the formation water that will not drain (difference between the specific yield of 0.1 and the porosity of 0.3 - (EPRCO, 1982)).

The uncertainties associated with this option are the same as those in Option 1. The dilution effects from injection of treated solution would be temporary and localized. Permanent change would require system operation until Highland Reservoir has filled, which is expected to take up to 100 years.

OPTION 3. Fresh Water, Ground Water Sweep

Fresh water injection was considered as an another possible corrective action technique. This plan would utilize an expanded system of wells as described in Ground Water Remedial Action Alternative Number 12.2 and Water Treatment Alternative Number 2.2 in Appendix B (WWL, 1989). However, a fresh water source other than Highland Reservoir would be needed due to the U and Se concentrations caused by naturally occurring mineralization. This option leaves 37 million gallons of water in the aquifer that could be used at a cost of \$105,000 per million gallons.

The cost versus benefits was determined using the following assumptions:

a) The volume of recoverable solution that would be disposed and replaced with fresh water would be about 37 millions gallons over a period of five years. This is the same volume as the last option.

b) The rate of recovery and reinjection would be about 7.4 million gallons per year.

c) The cost of the system including wells, evaporation pond, operations and maintenance would be about \$3.9 M or \$105,000/million gallons of solution disposed. The total treatment cost including the current corrective action plan would rise to \$4.5 million versus the \$0.2 million maximum value of the water.

d) The water quality in Highland Reservoir would not change. The Ni, Ra 226 and 228 and U concentrations at well 125, 175 and 177 would decline by about one third, just as in the last option.

The uncertainties associated with the option are the same as those of Option 1. The dilution effects from injection of fresh water would be temporary and localized. Permanent change would require system operation until Highland Reservoir has filled, which is expected to take up to 100 years.

The downside of this alternative is that the fresh water injected would be degraded in a formation that is not used as a water source in this area. It also may cause PHCs to move in a slug rather than diluting them. Areas that have been dewatered may be resaturated with fluid that does not meet the GPLs.

OPTION 4. Install Reactive Barrier

A reactive barrier was evaluated. One of these structures could be built to minimize the movement of pH sensitive solutes along the Western flow path. The location of this barrier would be approximately 100 feet up-gradient from the **POC** well. The West flow path barrier would be about 175 feet deep by 5000 feet long and 8 feet wide. The bottom 25 feet would be filled with 37,000 cubic yards of limestone having a particle size of 0.25 inches.

The estimated cost of the reactive barriers is 14 million dollars. Additionally, the pump and evaporate option, discussed as Option 1, would be utilized at a cost of one million dollars. This option leaves no useable water in the uppermost aquifer - it will be dry.

The cost versus benefit was determined using the following assumptions:

a) The volume of low pH solution that would be contacted by the barriers is 13 million gallons. This is the 1996 drainable volume estimated by the EPRCO study in Appendix 3 less the volume pumped out during 1997-1998.

b) The total cost would be 15 million dollars.

c) Combined with the Option 1 cost, the cost for the reactive barrier would be about \$400,000/million gallons of solution. The total treatment cost including the current

corrective action plan would rise to \$15.6 million versus the \$0.2 million maximum value of the water.

d) The concentration of Ni and Ra 226 **+** 228 in Highland Reservoir would not change. Ni and Ra 228 are already not detectable. Ra 226 has averaged 4 pCi/I since 1990 versus 0.8 pCi/I at Well 175. The higher Ra 226 concentration in the reservoir is probably the result of natural mineralization around the lake perimeter. The Ni and Ra 226 & 228 concentrations at Well 175 (before it went dry) would probably decline to near background since Ni solubility is pH sensitive and radium would tend to co-precipitate with gypsum as the low pH fluid was neutralized and gypsum was created. A similar barrier was not evaluated across the eastern flow. First, only U exceeds the GPLs at this well and it is not sensitive to this type of barrier. Uranium is soluble at low, neutral and high pH values. Uranium can only be precipitated in a bicarbonate/carbonate environment by reducing agents in the absence of oxygen. Second, the present flow gradient between the tailings basin and Well 125 is towards the tailings basins, so the barrier would not impact the well (see Figure 1 of Appendix 3).

Figure 2 through 5 demonstrate on graphs the cost versus benefits expressed as Ni, Ra 226 **+** 228 and U concentrations comparing the CAP results from the past nine years and the alternative options.

After considering the practicable corrective actions, ECMC believes that the current concentrations of PHCs at the POCs are As Low As Reasonably Achievable considering the value of TDSS ground water at the tailings basin and high cost to benefit ratio of the alternatives to ending ground water mitigation.

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FIGURE 1 MITIGATION ANNUAL OPERATING COSTS

FIGURE 2 Well 125 U Concentration vs Cost

FIGURE 3 Well 175 Ni Concentration vs Cost

Ra 226+228 (pCi/l)

FIGURE 5 Well 177 U Concentration vs Cost

FIGURE 6 ACTUAL AND PROJECTED PUMPING RATE (Continue Current Corrective Action Program)

YEAR

