
Technical Evaluation Report

**For the U.S. Department of Energy UMTRCA Title I
Lakeview, Oregon, Processing Site:
Review of the Draft Groundwater Compliance Action Plan**

Final Report

**U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
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**Technical Evaluation Report
Review of the Draft Groundwater Compliance Action Plan
UMTRCA Title I Lakeview, Oregon, Processing Site**

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Introduction

The review and approval process for the Lakeview processing site groundwater compliance action plan (GCAP) was initiated by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) upon their submittal of a draft plan by letter dated September 3, 1999 (ML003691889) followed by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) request for additional information in February 2002 (ML020350695). DOE submitted a second draft of the GCAP to the NRC in October 2002 (ML023040318). Thereafter, on January 29, 2004, the NRC issued a request for additional information to DOE (ML040300853). DOE responded to the second request for information by email dated August 2, 2005, and included in that response was a white paper entitled, "*Rational for DOE's Selected Compliance Strategy for the Lakeview, Oregon, UMTRA Ground Water Site.*" (ML052410371) A third draft groundwater compliance action plan dated September 2006 was submitted by the DOE to the NRC on July 25, 2007 (ML072200551). The 2006 GCAP was revised to address the NRC comments transmitted to DOE on January 29, 2004. In its review of the revised GCAP, NRC staff identified several issues that needed to be resolved prior to NRC concurrence. A conference call was held on May 7, 2009, to discuss those issues. A summary report of the issues identified during the conference call was provided to the DOE by letter dated, June 10, 2009 (ML091590512). The GCAP was revised to address the NRC identified issues and was submitted for review on June 25, 2010 (ML101930356). It is this last version of the draft GCAP for which this NRC's Technical Evaluation Report (TER) is based.

Location

The Lakeview processing site is a former uranium ore processing facility located approximately 1.5 miles north-northwest of the town of Lakeview in Lake County, Oregon and 16 miles north of the Oregon-California border. The former processing site previously contained mill tailings, which were relocated 7 miles northwest of the Lakeview processing site from 1986 to 1988. The former processing site is located in the Goose Creek Valley of south-central Oregon and is approximately 4,750 feet above sea level. Mountains are to the west and east of the site and reach elevations of approximately 8,000 feet.

Surface Water

Thermal Springs

The town of Lakeview and surrounding area, including the mill site, is located within a known geothermal resource area that encompasses approximately eight square miles (DOE 2011). There are two geothermal springs near the town. The larger of the two is Hunters Hot Spring north of Lakeview and is contiguous with the north site boundary near the raffinate ponds. There is a smaller geothermal site about two miles south of Lakeview called the Barry Ranch Hot Spring (Black 1994). The geothermal resource area was recently evaluated for a proposed expansion of the existing geothermal power plant system that is immediately north of and contiguous to the Hunters Hot Spring. Detailed information on the geothermal area is found in a draft final environmental assessment prepared by the Department of Energy (DOE 2011).

Hunters Hot Spring

The water quality of hot springs in the region typically has elevated concentrations of total dissolved solids, sulfate and inorganic minerals such as boron, molybdenum and in particular arsenic and the hot springs in the Lakeview area are no exception. Detailed information on the water quality in the geothermal area around the Lakeview site is provided in the draft final environmental assessment prepared by the Department of Energy (DOE 2011). Water quality testing documented that elemental concentrations tended to be highly variable and in some areas the natural concentration of arsenic were slightly above 1.0 milligram per liter. Boron concentrations greater than 5 milligrams per liter were also recorded. The pH of the water was alkaline and ranged from 7.8 to 8.4. The spring has had some of the highest sulfate concentration of all the thermal sites in Lakeview County and has some of the highest sulfate concentrations in the entire state.

Goose Lake

Goose Lake is the last lake in a series of ancient lakes found within the endorheic Goose Lake basin. Although the majority of the lake lies within California most of the basin valley and nearly two thirds of the total drainage area, 722 square miles, are in Oregon (Heck, et al. 2008). Goose Lake is considered to be an alkaline lake with high total dissolved solids. Historically the lake has also been known to go completely dry during droughts. Also, during drought periods alkali dust storms have been noted. With no surface outlets, saline and alkaline concentrations have risen and most lake waters in the basin are too salty for domestic or irrigation use (Goose 2007).

Groundwater

The primary water bearing units in the Oregon portion of the Goose Lake Valley Basin are Holocene sedimentary deposits and Pleistocene lava flows. The Holocene sedimentary deposits include lake deposits, alluvium and alluvial fan deposits with variable water yields. Highly jointed, highly permeable Pleistocene lava flows interfinger with valley sediments, range in thickness from 50 to 200 feet, and generally are considered to be high yielding groundwater

wells. The Goose Lake Valley Groundwater basin water is generally classified as a calcium carbonate type (DOE 2011).

Logs of wells in Township 39 South, Range 20 East, Section 4 where the processing site is located and Section 9 immediately south of the site indicate that there are alternating bands of clay and clay/gravel sediment in the upper 800 feet of valley fill (ORNL 1980). Groundwater at the site occurs under confined and unconfined conditions. There is a strong upward flow gradient from leaky artesian aquifers in the thin, unconsolidated lacustrine sediments in the thermal zones. It is thought that the presence of this strong upward flow gradient minimizes the possibility of groundwater contamination in the lacustrine sediments (Ford 1977).

The former processing site has been characterized as having two relatively shallow groundwater zones. The water table beneath the site generally occurs at a depth of five to 15 feet from the surface. The uppermost zone is referred to as the Shallow Zone (16 to 30 feet deep) and the Deeper Zone (60 to 75 feet deep). The historical head variation between the Shallow and Deeper Zone background wells has ranged from 13 to 17 feet indicating a hydraulic connection between the two.

An Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) report (ORNL 1980) stated that most wells in the area were shallow with a static water level ranging from 20 to 40 feet below the surface. The Oregon Water Resources Department maintains a groundwater observation well north of Missouri Avenue within the site boundary and south of the mill tailings and raffinate pond sites. Seasonal water levels have varied as much as 20 feet over the last 10 years with records going back to 1965. The groundwater from the Shallow and Deeper Zones move from northeast of the site to the southwest under a hydraulic gradient that ranges from 0.003 to 0.01. The average linear velocity in the Shallow Zone is calculated to be 50 feet per year and 160 feet per year in the Deeper Zone (Jacobs Engineering Group, Inc. 1993).

Groundwater at the Hunters Hot Spring is shallow, approximately 38 feet below the ground surface. A geyser was created at the spring when a shallow groundwater well was drilled. Historically it would erupt approximately every 90 seconds. It would cease to erupt during the dry summer months, periods of drought, and when the shallow water levels in the area were drawn down for irrigation purposes (USGS 1980).

Remedial Action History

The 258-acre site includes areas formerly occupied by seven raffinate or evaporation ponds, a tailings pile, and processing buildings. From 1986 to 1988, 736,000 tons (943,630 cubic yards) of uranium mill tailings and other process-related solid waste were removed from the Lakeview, processing site and moved to a disposal cell located on the Collins Ranch about 7 miles northwest of Lakeview. In some areas of the former raffinate or evaporation ponds, contaminated materials were removed from depths of more than 50 feet below ground surface. The cost of the removal action to move mill tailings and process related waste from 1986 to 1988 was \$24,571,000 (DOE 2006).

Pacific Pine Products, a lumber company, now uses the former mill buildings. Other small businesses have constructed buildings in the immediate area of the former mill buildings. Barbwire fences enclose the former evaporation pond and tailings pile areas in open fields. The

entire site is zoned for commercial-light industrial use. The southern portion of the area is part of Lake County's urban growth boundary where commercial businesses are being developed. Other areas in and near the site are also being developed for commercial businesses.

Groundwater Compliance Status

Eleven site-related constituents of potential concern (COPC) were previously identified in the baseline risk assessment (BLRA) for the former processing site (DOE 1996) and an initial draft GCAP was subsequently submitted in 1999. The initial draft GCAP proposed a "no remediation" compliance strategy for the processing site because of the presence of widespread ambient contamination not related to milling activities. At that time, constituents regulated under Title 40 of the Code of Federal Regulations, section 192 (40 CFR 192) did exceed standards. As a result, and to ensure protectiveness, institutional controls (ICs) were established to prevent well installation in the area most likely to be affected by site-related COPCs. Currently, completion of wells within the IC boundary are required by state ordinance to be at a minimum depth of 250 feet below ground surface (DOE 2010).

Institutional Controls

The 40-acre processing site is owned by the United States of America and came under the NRC general license in Title 10 of the *Code of Federal Regulations*, section 40.27 (10 CFR 40.27) in 1995. DOE is the licensee for the processing site and, in accordance with the requirements for UMTRCA Title I sites, is responsible for the stewardship and long-term care of the site. Institutional controls at the disposal site, as defined by DOE Policy 454.1, consist of federal ownership of the property, a site perimeter fence, warning/no-trespassing signs along the property boundary, and a locked gate at the entrance to the site.

Monitoring wells

The groundwater monitoring network comprises eight point-of-compliance wells (four monitoring well pairs: 0602/0609, 0603/0608, 0604/0607, and 0605/0606) located east and south of the cell and one upgradient compliance well (0515) located west of the disposal site. Seven additional DOE-owned monitoring wells (0513, 0514, 0516, 0520, 0521, 0522, and 0523) exist on privately-owned property near the site, but are not part of the compliance monitoring network.

Outstanding Issues

The NRC staff identified five issues that were discussed during a teleconference with the DOE on May 7, 2009. Summaries of these issues were provided to the DOE by letter dated June 10, 2009 (ML091590512). Each of the issues identified by the NRC staff was indirectly addressed by the subsequent submittal of the revised GCAP in 2010. The 2010 GCAP was reviewed by NRC Staff to determine if each of the five issues summarized below were sufficiently resolved.

NRC Issue 1 - Proposed Groundwater Compliance Strategy

In the initial draft GCAP, DOE proposed that no remediation be undertaken based on "limited use groundwater" and application of supplemental standards to achieve compliance with Part B

of 40 CFR 192.22. This issue is based on the proposed no remediation strategy and can be subdivided into the following three issues:

NRC Issue 1a. Hydraulic isolation from underlying aquifer

The near-surface contaminated groundwater zone (above 250 feet below ground surface) has not been demonstrated to be significantly hydraulically separate from the deeper groundwater zone, which is permitted to be tapped by future drinking water wells within the IC boundary. If the near-surface and deep groundwater zones are significantly hydraulically connected, the groundwater zone considered for “limited use groundwater” would extend down to zones (250 feet below ground surface) that are considered a potential source of drinking water.

GCAP Discussion of the Issue

It is highly unlikely that shallow site-related constituents have influenced the groundwater quality at depths below the 250 feet IC boundary and that no further characterization of vertical hydraulic connectivity is warranted. The DOE determination was based on the following:

- Low concentrations of site related groundwater constituents in the shallow aquifer;
- Low volumes of waste produced at the processing site in its 3 years of operation;
- The considerable source removal efforts;
- The considerable depth (over 200 feet) that the water would need to travel through, during which it would undergo significant dilution and attenuation;
- The presence of the numerous interbedded clays and sands that would adsorb COPCs and would also impede vertical groundwater flow;
- The potential for an upward hydraulic gradient from deeper zones, as characterized by the general geologic basin setting;
- Evidence from deeper wells near the site that indicate the presence of an upward hydraulic gradient. This evidence can be seen in numerous well pairs; and
- There is no evidence that milling has affected deeper wells in the vicinity of the site. Water quality is significantly and consistently better at depth, as indicated by the comparison of water quality data for shallow and deep well pairs.

NRC Staff Finding

The NRC staff finds the issue pertaining to reduced water quality via potential hydraulic connections to zones 250 feet below ground surface is resolved. This determination is based on recent monitoring results being in compliance for all hazardous constituents and historically low concentrations of constituents listed in 40 CFR 192 in the shallow aquifer. While all of DOE's determinations are considered valid, without a source of contamination, the potential for contaminant transport through hydraulic connections is irrelevant. The presence of sulfate and manganese at concentrations that potentially pose a risk to human health and the environment shall be monitored as discussed in NRC finding for issue 3 to verify that sulfate and manganese concentrations are reducing to background values. The elevated sulfate and manganese concentrations are unlikely to influence groundwater quality below the 250 foot IC boundary based on the historic concentration ranges from shallow and deep well pairs 0503 and 0504, 0505 and 0506, and 0513 and 0514 including pump test data indicating that the shallow and

deep zones are both part of a multiple aquifer system containing a succession of leaky aquifers separated by aquitards of varying thickness and lateral extent (DOE 1996).

NRC Issue 1b. Domestic use of downgradient groundwater

Oregon regulations indicate that the shallow groundwater zone beneath the site and surrounding area is not a current or potential source of drinking water. Shallow groundwater located in this area is currently being tapped by domestic well 0543 as that well could potentially receive impacted groundwater from the plume of contamination.

DOE GCAP Discussion

One resident within the IC boundary has a private drinking water well that is less than 250 feet in depth, this well (0543) produces high-quality water. To ensure compliance with the IC boundary, DOE visited the owners in 2005 and in 2009 in an attempt to provide them with a hookup to municipal water or to drill a deeper well. The State of Oregon has also had similar discussions with the owners. The residents currently have clean, cold, good-tasting drinking water and are not interested in any action that might alter this situation.

NRC Staff Finding

The NRC staff believes that the DOE has made an adequate attempt to provide the one resident within the IC boundary an alternate water supply. While well 0543 currently provides water that is of high quality, future quality should be ensured. The NRC staff is requiring that this well be monitored on a limited frequency and at the well owners request to ensure that the water quality remains suitable for the owner(s) of the well. If the water quality is determined to be unsuitable for the current or future resident(s), DOE shall provide an alternate supply of water such as a municipal water hookup or a well drilled to a deeper depth.

NRC Issue 1c. Demonstration of “limited use” groundwater

The DOE must demonstrate that the groundwater meets the criteria for “limited use” groundwater per 40 CFR 192.11(e) for use of the proposed groundwater compliance strategy of supplemental standards established under 40 CFR 192.22.

DOE GCAP Discussion

Arsenic, boron, and molybdenum concentrations are elevated in waters associated with the geothermal area northeast of the former mill site and are most likely a product of that geothermal activity (DOE 1996). Arsenic is known to be associated with geothermal systems in the western United States. Boron may also be present in subsurface geothermal fluids, or it may be a result of the dissolution of subsurface salts by those fluids. It is known that boron is a significant trace component in the subsurface salts in the Lakeview area (Phillips 1971). Heated geothermal waters are likely responsible for dissolving and releasing significant amounts of soluble constituents to the groundwater.

Water quality in the vicinity of the Lakeview site varies widely as a result of several influences, including the general hydrologic setting, the geothermal area, and the former uranium-milling activities. This variability makes the interpretation of milling-related effects on groundwater quality complex. Any site-related COPCs would have intermixed with naturally occurring regional contamination.

NRC Staff Finding

The NRC staff agrees that groundwater in the alluvium has been influenced by numerous sources unrelated to milling operations which have created conditions that are consistent with the criteria found in 40 CFR 192.11(e)(2), which states in part, "*Limited use groundwater* means groundwater that is not a current or potential source of drinking water because... (2) widespread, ambient contamination not due to activities involving residual radioactive materials from a designated processing site exists that cannot be cleaned up using treatment methods reasonably employed in public water systems...." The DOE has provided reasonable assurance that the contamination of groundwater by listed constituents from residual radioactive material at the Lakeview Processing Site has been brought into compliance with the groundwater standards of 40 CFR 192.12(c) by using the compliance strategy of no remediation with the application of supplemental standards established under 40 CFR 192.22, as requested in the 1999, 2002, and 2006 GCAPs. However, as discussed in the 2010 GCAP, groundwater monitoring has indicated that all of the constituents are currently below the standards found in Appendix I of 40 CFR 192 or background for the site. Therefore, the site is in compliance with the provisions of 40 CFR 192.02(c)(3), which states in part, "...The concentration of a listed constituent in groundwater must not exceed: (A) The background level of that constituent in the groundwater; or (B) For any of the constituents listed in Table 1 to Subpart A [Appendix I to 40 CFR 192], the respective value given in that Table if the background level of the constituent is below the value given in the Table...."

NRC Issue 2. Background concentrations of molybdenum

Page 3-5 of the 2006 GCAP states, "[t]hrough other constituents, such as arsenic, boron, and molybdenum are somewhat elevated at some site locations, site concentrations are below geothermal concentrations." However, this statement contradicts information in the BLRA (DOE 1996), which includes the statement, "[m]olybdenum concentrations in contaminated ground water are four times those of the geothermal background ground water." This contradictory information has led to uncertainty concerning background concentrations of molybdenum for the site. Groundwater concentrations of molybdenum at several wells at the site have exceeded the UMTRCA maximum concentration limits (MCLs) in 40 CFR 192 [DOE Remedial Action Plan (RAP), 1992]. A compliance strategy that relies on background groundwater quality, such as supplemental standards based on *limited use groundwater*, is necessary to address this issue. To satisfy the requirements of 40 CFR 192.12(c)(1), the DOE must determine or clarify background concentrations for molybdenum in the main portion of the Lakeview valley around the millsite.

DOE GCAP Discussion

Upon examination of the data in Table 3.3 of the BLRA, it was found that the reverse was true, that is, molybdenum concentration in the geothermal water was approximately four times

greater than concentrations in the site-related groundwater. In 2002, molybdenum was below the risk-based concentration of 0.18 mg/L (EPA 2009) at all locations and below detection at most locations. Therefore, analysis for molybdenum was discontinued in 2004.

NRC Staff Finding

The NRC Staff finds DOE's clarification to the discrepancy between the statements made in the 2006 GCAP and the 1996 BLRA, that molybdenum concentrations were four times greater in site related groundwater than concentrations found in offsite geothermal water, consistent with the data found in Table 3.3 of the 1996 BLRA (DOE 1996). The NRC Staff considers the issue regarding molybdenum concentrations closed and agrees with DOE's 2004 decision to discontinue analysis for molybdenum.

NRC Issue 3. Delineation of the contaminant plume boundary

The extent of the groundwater contamination plume has not been identified. Considering the plume detected in the northern half of former raffinate and tailings ponds (DOE 1992) and adjacent to the southwest corner of the former raffinate and tailings ponds. Additional wells may be needed to define the extent of millsite contamination to the west and south of the former raffinate and tailings ponds. Further characterization of the site should be provided to identify the contaminant plume boundary.

DOE GCAP Discussion

Monitoring results have allowed the elimination of most COPCs on the basis of comparison with 40 CFR 192 standards or background levels. The only remaining indicator constituents of site-related effects to groundwater are sulfate and manganese. DOE is committed to continuing the monitoring of these two constituents as a voluntary activity for a reasonable period of time to ensure protectiveness of human health and the environment. As part of this monitoring, DOE may assess the adequacy of the immediate area, hydraulically downgradient to the IC boundary. These activities may be implemented beginning in 2014, and would be conducted solely pursuant to DOE discretion; the monitoring plan may change as additional information is obtained and conditions are reassessed.

NRC Staff Finding

The NRC Staff has determined that monitoring activities at the site have adequately identified constituents under paragraph (c)(1) of 40 CFR 192.02. Further characterization of the groundwater with regard to paragraph (c)(1) is considered unnecessary. Furthermore, the NRC staff agrees with the selected compliance strategy of no remediation and the determination that no additional groundwater monitoring for 40 CFR 192 constituents or further actions beyond well decommissioning are required. This finding is based on the fact that all of the 40 CFR 192 constituents identified at the Lakeview site have declined to below their respective standards and the source of the site related contamination has been relocated. Groundwater monitoring activities implemented to fulfill the requirements of 40 CFR 192.03, which are used to comply with the standards identified in 40 CFR 192.02 are considered complete.

The NRC Staff disagrees with the voluntary monitoring activities proposed for sulfate and manganese. The NRC Staff agrees that sulfate and manganese are not listed under 40 CFR 192.02(c)(1) and are considered to be nonregulated constituents. However, the DOE have identified sulfate and manganese to be present at levels exceeding background near the former mill site at concentrations that could pose a risk to human health and the environment. Therefore, the DOE will be required to perform groundwater monitoring to ensure that the former mill site will be cared for in such a manner as to protect the public health, safety, and environment in order to comply with 10 CFR 40.27(a). Groundwater monitoring shall be required until the established IC boundary that encompasses groundwater potentially affected by site related activities is reduced to the licensed boundary or removed completely. The DOE shall continue to assess geothermal influences in the vicinity of the current downgradient IC boundary for sulfate and manganese as proposed in Appendix A to the 2010 GCAP.

NRC Issue 4. Coverage of compliance monitoring wells

There is only one monitoring well located at the IC boundary in the downgradient direction of the site that is proposed for long-term monitoring. Additional compliance monitoring wells at the IC boundary will ensure that contaminants will not move beyond the boundary undetected. Other compliance monitoring wells, not at the IC boundary, can be identified through groundwater modeling that will help show that groundwater protection standards will be met at the boundary. The DOE should identify additional compliance monitoring wells at the IC boundary or propose other compliance monitoring well locations that will ensure long-term compliance with groundwater protection standards.

DOE GCAP Discussion

Additional compliance monitoring wells, if warranted, would likely be located hydraulically downgradient (southwest) of the former raffinate ponds area and west of the current IC boundary between the west IC boundary near well 0505 and existing well 0518. If additional wells are not warranted, then the basic monitoring approach may continue to be implemented on a voluntary, as-need basis. If new wells are installed, the new wells, and possibly well 0518, may be added to the basic monitoring approach. At the conclusion of the voluntary activities, DOE may decommission all monitoring wells in accordance with applicable State of Oregon regulations.

NRC Staff Findings

The NRC staff finds the basic groundwater monitoring approach adequate and agrees with the DOEs monitoring objectives for the Lakeview processing site. As previously mentioned within the findings of issue 3, the NRC's regulatory obligation, under 10 CFR 40.27(a), is to protect public health and safety, at the Lakeview processing site, which was the former location of the Lakeview disposal site. If additional monitoring wells are determined to be necessary to protect public health and safety, DOE shall add the additional monitoring well locations to the required monitoring well network described in the long-term surveillance plan. Voluntary monitoring is not sufficient to satisfy 10 CFR 40.27. The long-term surveillance plan, which is the basis for licensing, addresses the requirements for groundwater monitoring after remedial activities are completed. The groundwater monitoring plan described in Section 3.0 of the Appendix A work

plan to the 2010 GCAP shall be a requirement, rather than a voluntary activity, to provide reasonable assurance that concentrations of site related constituents are below ambient background concentrations prior to discontinuance of groundwater monitoring.

NRC Issue 5. Proposed monitoring program

The draft GCAP provides documentation of a sulfate groundwater plume that extends southwest from the former raffinate ponds at the site to an area located outside of the IC boundary. Because a portion of this sulfate plume was suspected by DOE to have originated from a geothermal source, DOE conducted sulfur isotopic analysis of groundwater monitoring well samples from the sulfate plume to distinguish millsite-related sulfate from geothermal-related sulfate (DOE 1992). DOE's conclusion from the isotopic study was that millsite-related sulfate is only present in the portion of the plume that is inside of the IC boundary and immediately downgradient of the former raffinate ponds. DOE further concluded that the remainder of the sulfate plume that extends outside of the IC boundary consists of geothermal-related sulfate. Based on this information, the monitoring program in the GCAP should include groundwater sample analysis (e.g., sulfate isotopic analysis) that analytically distinguishes millsite-related sulfate from geothermal-related sulfate.

DOE GCAP Discussion

Because the source(s) of the sulfate and manganese are ambiguous, a sulfur isotope analysis and well 0518 have been added to the basic monitoring approach in 2012 only to better assess the geothermal influence in the vicinity of the current downgradient IC boundary, as represented by well 0505. This additional information may help with the assessment of the adequacy of the downgradient IC boundary.

NRC Staff Finding

As previously mentioned in the findings for NRC issue 3 and 4, the NRC staff is requiring the DOE to perform characterization and monitoring for sulfate and manganese as described in Section 3.0 of the Appendix A work plan to the 2010 GCAP. If additional wells are warranted, the DOE shall notify the NRC and propose additional downgradient monitoring wells for future sampling. The DOE shall also evaluate the existing IC boundary to determine the effectiveness of the IC boundaries protectiveness from site-related sulfate and manganese after each sampling event.

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