

**Final Remedial Investigation/Feasibility
Study—Environmental Assessment
for the Monticello, Utah,
Uranium Mill Tailings Site**

**Volume I
Remedial Investigation**

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FOREWORD

The Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) has been supplemented to include analyses sufficient to enable the U.S. Department of Energy to assess the impacts of the remedial action alternatives considered in terms of the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). As such, this RI/FS also serves as an Environmental Assessment (EA) for purposes of NEPA. On the basis of this RI/FS-EA, the Department of Energy would issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the preferred remedial action alternative identified therein, if appropriate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Monticello Millsite is a 78-acre tract located along Montezuma Creek south of the City of Monticello, San Juan County, Utah. The mill was constructed by the Vanadium Corporation of America (VCA) in 1942 with funds from the Defense Plant Corporation. Initially, vanadium was produced, but from 1943 to 1944 a uranium-vanadium sludge was produced by VCA for the Manhattan Engineer District (MED). After milling operations ceased in 1944, VCA leased the mill from 1945 to 1946 to produce the uranium-vanadium sludge for MED. The Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) bought the site in 1948. Uranium milling commenced 15 September 1949 and continued to 1 January 1960, when the mill was permanently closed. Part of the land was transferred to the Bureau of Land Management, but otherwise the site has remained under the control of the AEC and its successor agencies, the U.S. Energy Research and Development Administration and the U.S. Department of Energy.

Approximately 1 million tons of uranium ore were processed at the mill; the resultant tailings are stored in four piles. The total volume of tailings and tailings-contaminated soil is estimated to be 1,570,000 cubic yards. In addition, some properties adjacent to the site (referred to as peripheral properties) are contaminated by residues from ore stockpiles and dispersed tailings. A number of business and residence properties in the City of Monticello are contaminated from the use of radioactive mill tailings as construction and fill material. The tailings piles were stabilized and covered with soil in 1961 to eliminate the possibility of further dispersal or use.

The chemical composition of the tailings is described in terms of the average concentrations of 17 elements. With one exception, these elements are listed as CERCLA hazardous substances at 40 CFR 302.4. The average concentrations of these elements indicate that most are enriched in the tailings and ore relative to typical or "average" sandstones.

Dispersal of ore and tailings during and after milling operations resulted in the contamination of surface soil on the millsite. Vanadium and uranium were the only substances extracted in the milling process; other radioactive and nonradioactive constituents of the ore remained in the tailings and were not separated prior to disposal. Consequently, dispersal of the tailings results in the dispersal of all of these substances. Measurement of a single constituent will adequately portray the areal distribution of the others. Radium-226, a product of the decay of uranium, was selected to portray the distribution of these elements because of the ease of measurement and because a standard for soil has been established at 40 CFR 192.12.

The background concentration of radium-226 in soil in the Monticello area is about 1 picocurie per gram (pCi/g), or about 0.037 disintegrations per second per gram. The regulations at 40 CFR 192 require remediation of open land if the radium-226 concentration in the upper 15 centimeters of soil exceeds 5 pCi/g above background. Thus, the remedial action standard for radium at the millsite is 6 pCi/g. Areas of elevated radium concentration are expected to have elevated concentrations of CERCLA hazardous substances that were enriched in the ore. Areas where radium is at or near background concentration will have correspondingly low concentrations of CERCLA hazardous substances.

Montezuma Creek, an intermittent stream which flows across the site, has cut through Mancos Shale, Dakota Sandstone, and the Burro Canyon Formation, all of Cretaceous age. The mill tailings were deposited on alluvium of Montezuma Creek and on Mancos Shale. The alluvium and Burro Canyon Formation are aquifers. Concentrations of uranium, vanadium, molybdenum, and selenium are elevated in the alluvial aquifer downgradient from the site. The alluvial aquifer is not used for domestic drinking-water supply, but two concerns arise over the observed concentrations of these elements. One is the possibility of this water migrating into the Burro Canyon aquifer, which is used by the City of Monticello for alternate water supply. The Mancos Shale, which locally underlies the alluvium, is impermeable and the Dakota Sandstone underlying the Mancos has been shown by on-site pumping tests to have very low vertical hydraulic conductivity. If there is uniform conductivity throughout the site, the estimated time for water to migrate through 87 feet of Dakota at well 34A on the Vanadium Pile is 745 years. Thus, the potential for contamination of the Burro Canyon aquifer appears to be low. Other concerns arise from the fact that the alluvial aquifer discharges to Montezuma Creek and can therefore affect surface-water quality downstream. Surface water in the creek is used for irrigation.

The drainage area of Montezuma Creek is approximately 26 square miles and is composed of two major sub-basins, North Creek and South Creek. Monticello Reservoir, which was recently constructed along South Creek, has a significant impact on the flood hydrology of Montezuma Creek. It is estimated that the probable maximum flood at the site, which would include a dam failure at Monticello Reservoir, would have a peak discharge of approximately 140,000 cubic feet per second. If left unprotected, the tailings piles would be subject to severe erosion from such a flood event.

Air monitoring for radon emissions and air particulates has been conducted for a number of years at the millsite. Standards listed at 40 CFR 192 for radon emissions on the piles and atmospheric radon concentrations at the edge of piles are exceeded. Radiologic air particulates are below the standards established in DOE Order 5480.1. Nonradiologic air particulate concentrations are consistent with background concentrations.

Natural background radiation is the major contributor to the overall radiation risk at Monticello. However, a smaller, but still significant addition results from the millsite in its present condition.

Several tailings-related elements are found in Montezuma Creek at concentrations that exceed State or Federal regulations. The potential for exposure to these concentrations suggests the need for remedial action to improve water quality. While the surface water should not be (and currently is not) used for drinking water, it appears to be acceptable for use in irrigating alfalfa for cattle.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The U. S. Department of Energy (DOE), under the authority of the Atomic Energy Act, initiated the Surplus Facilities Management Program (SFMP) in 1978 to assure safe caretaking and decommissioning of government facilities that had been retired from service but which still had radioactive contamination. In 1980, the millsite operated by the Atomic Energy Commission from 1948 to 1960 at Monticello, Utah, was accepted into the SFMP, and the Monticello Remedial Action Project (MRAP) was established to restore the government-owned millsite to safe levels of radioactivity, to dispose of or contain the tailings in an environmentally safe manner, and to perform remedial actions on off-site (vicinity) properties that had been contaminated by radioactive material from the mill operations. In 1983, remedial activities for vicinity properties were separated from MRAP with the establishment of the Monticello Vicinity Properties (MVP) Project. Both MRAP and MVP are currently administered by the Grand Junction Projects Office (GJPO) of the DOE.

From its inception, the SFMP has mandated that decommissioning activities follow the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Guidance and requirements for compliance included, but were not limited to, the following:

1. Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, issued by the Council on Environmental Quality at 40 CFR 1500 - 1508.
2. Final Guidelines for Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, issued by the U. S. Department of Energy at 45 FR 20694 - 20701 on 28 March 1980, and amended at 52 FR 47662 - 47670 on 15 December 1987.
3. The Environmental Compliance Guide, volumes 1 and 2, issued by the U.S. Department of Energy, Assistant Secretary for Environmental Protection, Safety, and Emergency Preparedness, Office of Environmental Compliance and Overview, National Environmental Policy Act Affairs Division, on 21 February 1981.
4. Implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act, U.S. Department of Energy Order 5440.1C, issued 9 April 1985.

In accordance with SFMP policy, MRAP initiated surveillance activities at the millsite in 1980. These activities at first consisted of water quality analysis but were later expanded to include atmospheric radon monitoring and air particulate sampling. Results are described in annual environmental monitoring reports issued at the GJPO (Korte and Thul, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984; Korte and Wagner, 1985, 1986; Sewell and Spencer, 1987; U.S. Department of Energy, 1988, 1989). These activities continue.

Site characterization activities at the Monticello Millsite commenced in 1981. The resulting *Monticello Remedial Action Project Site Analysis Report* was issued in draft form in 1983 and was finalized in 1984 (Abramiuk and others,

issued in draft form in 1983 and was finalized in 1984 (Abramiuk and others, 1984). The Site Analysis Report describes the site's history, geology and hydrology, the extent of surface and subsurface contamination of soil and water, and engineering alternatives for remediation of the site. On the basis of the findings in the draft Site Analysis Report, the GJTO issued an Action Description Memorandum in November 1983 recommending stabilization in place as the preferred remedial action alternative and preparation of an Environmental Assessment. The *Draft Environmental Assessment of Remedial Action at the Monticello Uranium Mill Tailings Site, Monticello, Utah* was completed in July 1985 (Bendix Field Engineering Corporation, 1985); it includes descriptions of remedial action alternatives and supporting information from the Site Analysis Report and on-going studies. While this draft Environmental Assessment was neither published nor used as a NEPA compliance document, it has been used extensively as a source for the present Remedial Investigation.

The Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (SARA) placed the SFMP activities at Monticello under the regulatory framework of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) and has resulted in a number of new developments. The DOE submitted its Hazard Ranking System Score for the Millsite to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on 31 October 1987. During 1987, existing environmental site characterization and engineering documents were revised into the format of the CERCLA Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) and were issued for DOE internal review in January 1988. The DOE, EPA, and the State of Utah entered into a Federal Facility Agreement (FFA) pursuant to CERCLA Section 120 in December 1988. This agreement stipulates the procedural framework for developing and implementing response actions under CERCLA/SARA.

1.2 SITE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.2.1 Site Location and Description

The Monticello mill tailings site is a 78-acre tract located in San Juan County, Utah (Figure 1-1). The site lies in Section 36, T. 33 S., R. 23 E., and Section 31, T. 33 S., R. 24 E. (Salt Lake Meridian). It is bordered on the south and southeast by land held by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Elsewhere, the site is bordered by the City of Monticello and private property. Land survey (Figure 1-2) indicates encroachments on all boundaries of the site, the largest being on the east and southeast sides. The encroachment onto the property directly east of the millsite has been remedied. The millsite and areas under investigation are shown in relation to the city of Monticello in Figure 1-3.

The Monticello site lies in the valley of Montezuma Creek which has incised a broad erosional surface that slopes eastward from the Abajo Mountains. Elevations of the property range from 6990 feet (ft) at the northwest corner to 6820 ft at the southeast corner. The topography of the millsite and adjacent areas is detailed in Figure 1-4.

A plan of the site is shown in Figure 1-5. The mill area covers approximately 10 acres and the tailings impoundment area covers the remaining 68 acres. During the period of mill operation, the site also included private land to

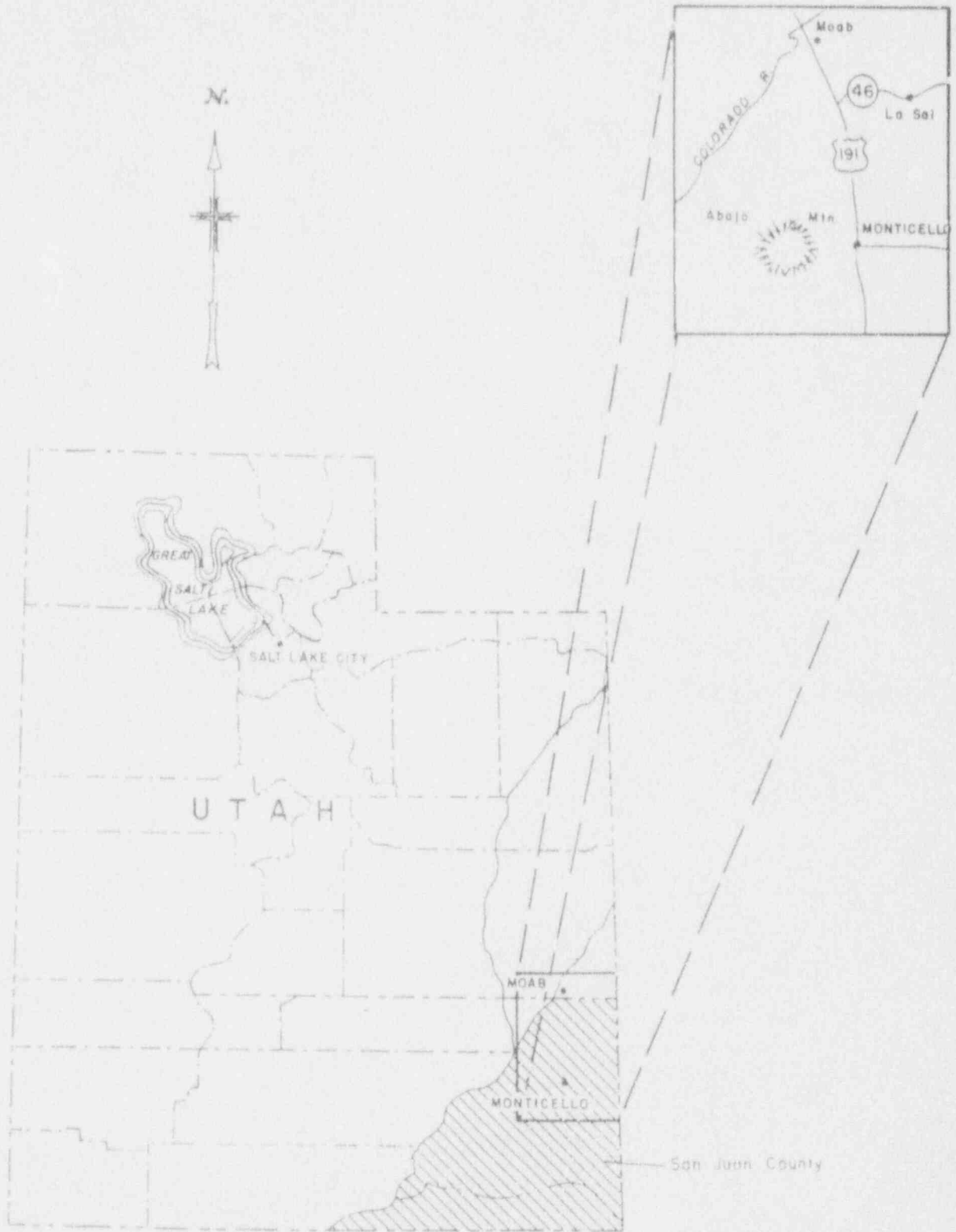


Figure 1-1. Monticello, Utah, Regional Location Map

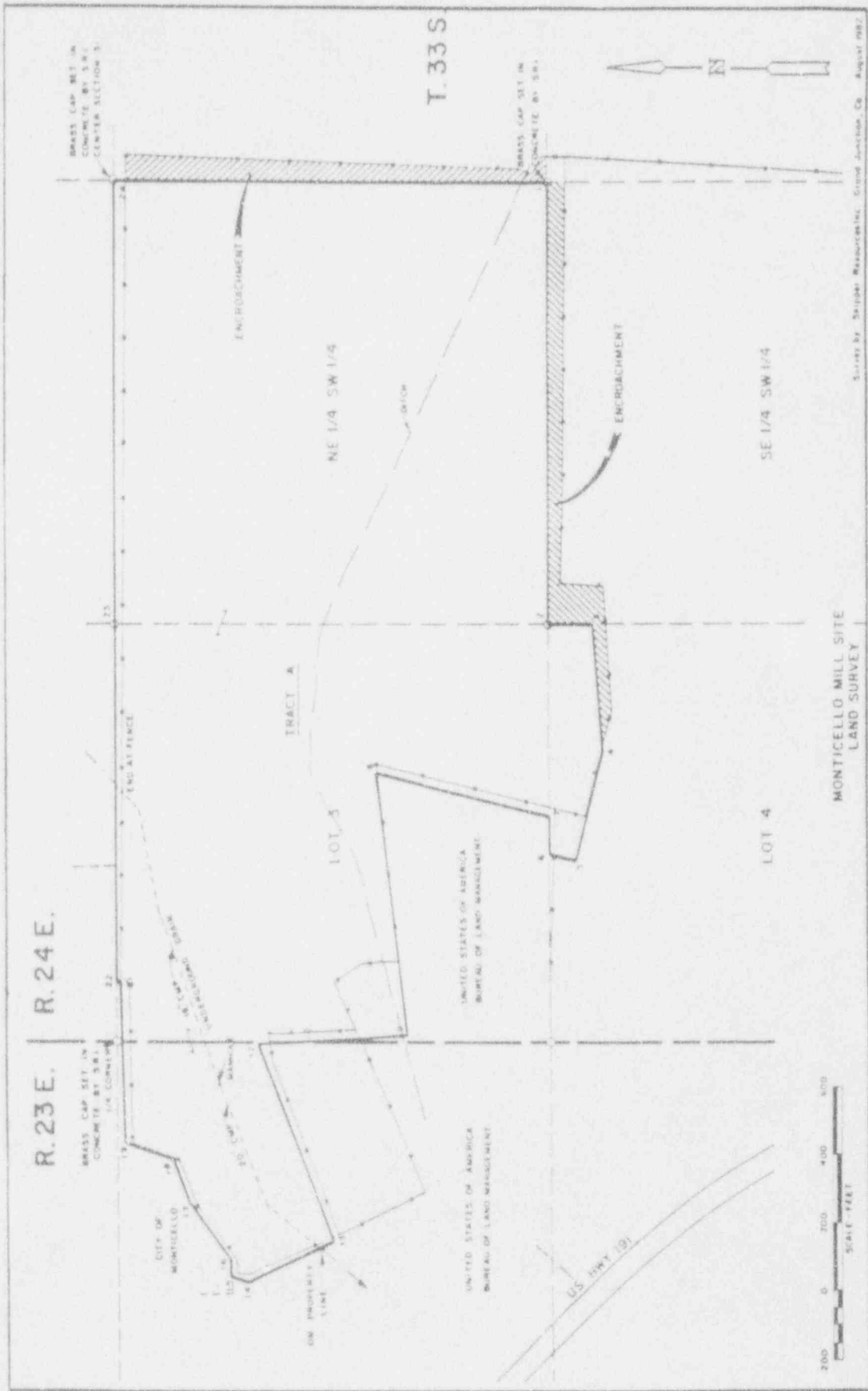


Figure 1-2. Monticello Millsite Land Survey

AREA	DATA SOURC	BORING OR TEST PIT NUMBER	SAMPLE NUMBER & TYPE	TOP OF SAMPLE (FEET)	BASE OF SAMPLE (FEET)	SAMPLE MIDPOINT (FEET)	USCS SYMBOG	MATERIAL TYPE	IN-PLACE DRY DENSITY (PCF)	NATURAL MOISTURE CONTENT (PERCENT)	SPECIFIC GRAVITY	FRACTION PASSING #4 SIEVE (PERCENT)	FRACTION PASSING #200 SIEVE (PERCENT)	LIQUID LIMIT	PLASTICITY INDEX	ASTM D 698 MAXIMUM DRY DENSITY (PCF)	ASTM D 698 OPTIMUM MOISTURE CONTENT (PERCENT)	OTHER TESTS
BLM PROPERTY-NORT D&M		TP-10	1/BULK	5.0	5.0	5.00	CL	Loess[?]	NA	10.9	NA	100.0	86.6	29.5	11.1	107.7	14.2	Mod Proct
BLM PROPERTY-NORT D&M		TP-10	2/ST	6.0	6.5	6.25	CL	Loess[?]	91.7	8.2	NA	NA	NA	27.9	9.6	NA	NA	Unconf Comp
BLM PROPERTY-NORT D&M		TP-10	4/ST	11.0	11.5	11.25	CL	Loess[?]	109.3	10.7	NA	NA	NA	43.8	21.6	NA	NA	Pem

KEY: USCS Unified Soil Classification System group symbol, ASTM D 2487 or D2488 (For rocks, symbol indicates geologic unit)
 ASTM Test designation of the American Society for Testing and Materials
 BENDIX "Data Collection for Engineering for the Uranium Mill Tailings Site and Adjacent Peripheral Properties, Monticello, Utah," Bendix Field Engineering Corporation, September 1986
 D&M "Final Report, Monticello Remedial Action Project, 1991 Millsite Characterization Study," Dames & Moore, September 17, 1991
 * Sample taken from a test pit excavated next to the designated borehole
 [?] Questionable value or identification

MATERIAL TYPE:	Tails-snd	Tailings sands
	Tails-slm	Tailings slimes
	Tails-snd/slm	Tailings sands and slimes, interbedded
	Tails-snd&slm	Tailings sands and slimes, mixed
	Cover	Cover material in place on tailings piles
	MVP spots	Material removed from Monticello Vicinity Properties
	Alluvium	Miscellaneous surficial deposits, mostly stream-laid
	Loess	Windblown fine-grained deposits
	Shale	Mancos Shale, usually weathered
	Sandstone	Dakota Sandstone
	Fill	Miscellaneous man-made fill

OTHER TESTS:

Mod Proct	Modified Proctor compaction
Unconf Comp	Unconfined compressive strength
Dir Shear	Direct shear, consolidated-drained
Triax-CUPP	Triaxial shear, consolidated-undrained with pore pressure measurements
Consol	One-dimensional consolidation
Pem	Permeability, falling-head or flexible-membrane
CMR	Capillary moisture rise
SAMPLE TYPES:	
BULK	Disturbed bag sample of loose cuttings or material from test pit
SS	Disturbed sample from 3.0" O.D. standard split-spoon drive sampler
ST	Relatively undisturbed sample from 3.0" O.D. thin-walled (Shelby) tube sampler
U	Relatively undisturbed sample from Dames & Moore Type "U" ring-lined drive sampler

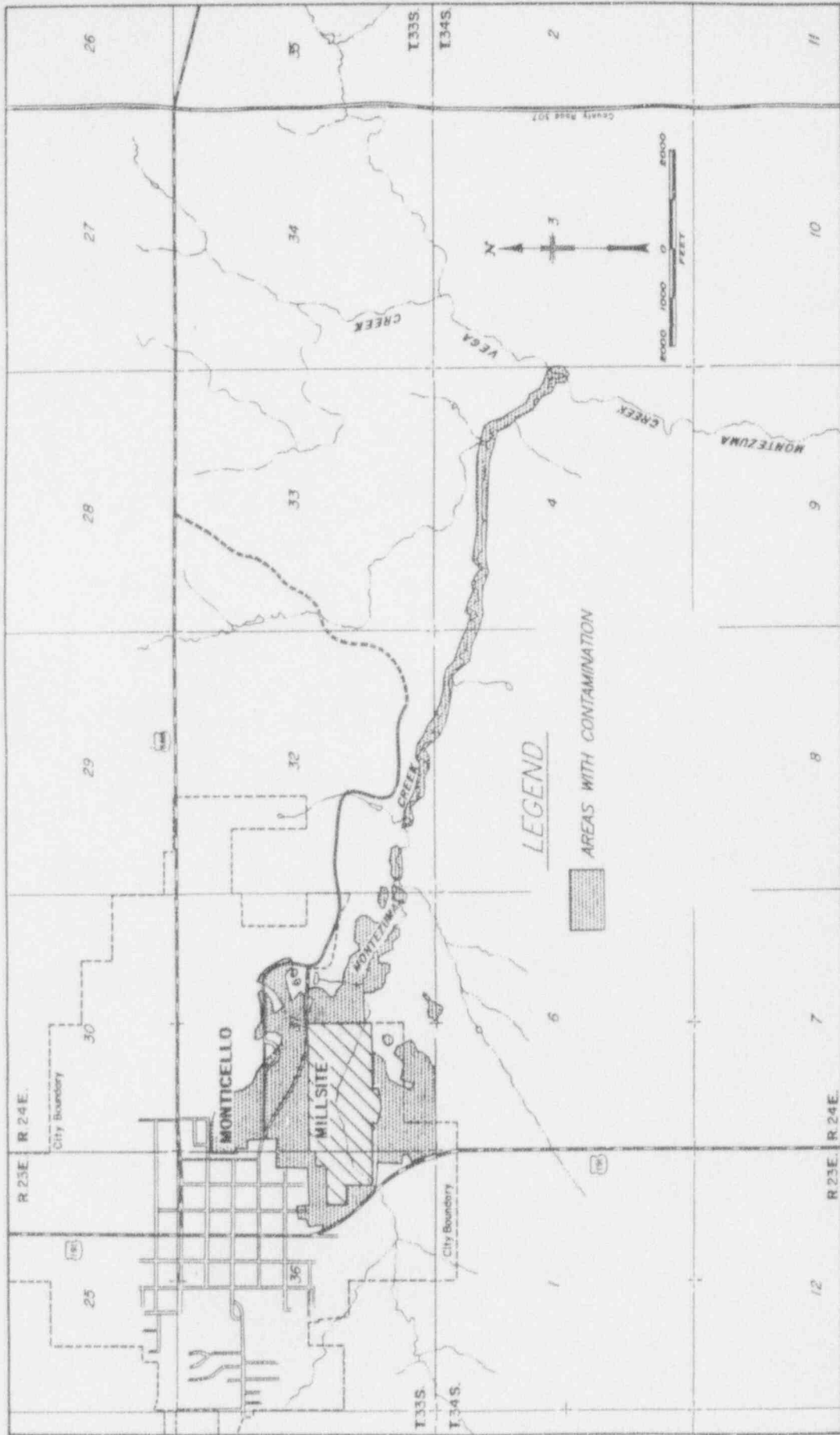
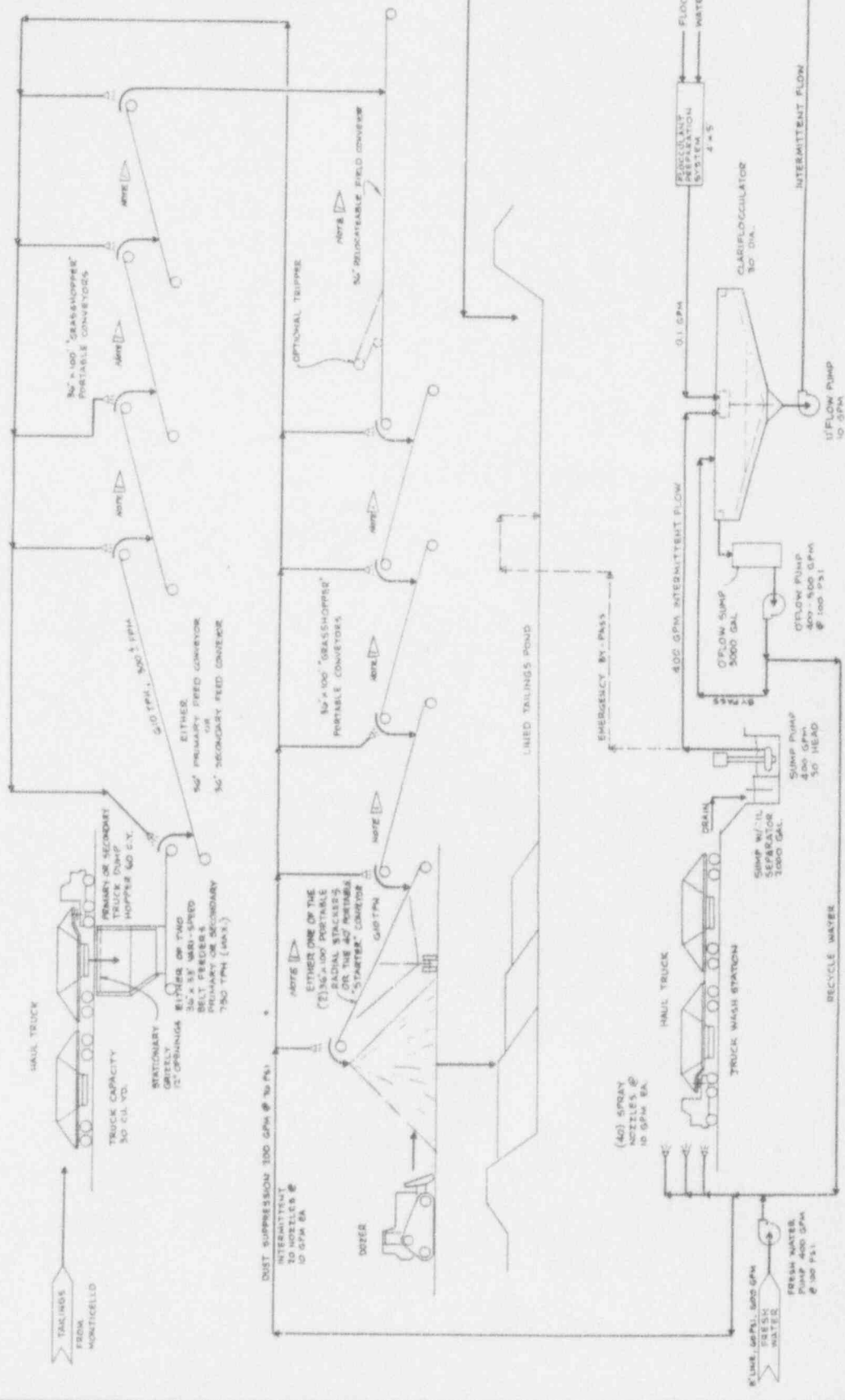


Figure 1-3. Contaminated Areas Under Investigation

NOTE 1: STARTING FROM THE PRIMARY OR SECONDARY FEED CONVEYOR, THE STRUNG OF PLACEMENT CONVEYORS SHOWN, REPRESENTS BOTH A PRIMARY AND A SECONDARY PLACEMENT CONVEYING SYSTEM. THE PRIMARY PLACEMENT CONVEYING SYSTEM MAY VARY IN NUMBER OF CONVEYORS FROM ONE TO NINE, AND MAY CONSIST OF ONE OR TWO FIELD CONVEYERS, AND FROM TWO TO SIX PORTABLE GRASSHOPPERS, AND EITHER A "STARTER" OR A STACKER. THE LOCATION IN THE STRUNG PLEASE REFER TO DRAWING 0261-1-B.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONVERTED MATERIAL:
 GRAIN: 85 PCP
 MOISTURE: 1.5 TO 3.5 PERCENT
 HULLS: 18 TO 20%
 REMAINS: 45%



NOTE 2: EITHER ONE OF THESE CONVEYERS MAY VARY, EXCEPT THAT THE STRUNG ALWAYS BEGINS WITH EITHER A "STARTER" OR A STACKER. THE SECONDARY PLACEMENT CONVEYING SYSTEM, CONSISTS OF A "STARTER" OR A STACKER, AND FROM TWO TO SIX PORTABLE GRASSHOPPERS AND EITHER A "STARTER" OR A STACKER. THE LOCATION IN THE STRUNG PLEASE REFER TO DRAWING 0261-1-B.

NOTE: EITHER ONE OF TWO PORTABLE GRASSHOPPERS OR ONE PORTABLE GRASSHOPPER AND ONE PORTABLE FEED CONVEYOR.

NOTE: EITHER ONE OF TWO PORTABLE GRASSHOPPERS OR ONE PORTABLE GRASSHOPPER AND ONE PORTABLE FEED CONVEYOR.

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NOTE: EITHER ONE OF TWO PORTABLE GRASSHOPPERS OR ONE PORTABLE GRASSHOPPER AND ONE PORTABLE FEED CONVEYOR.

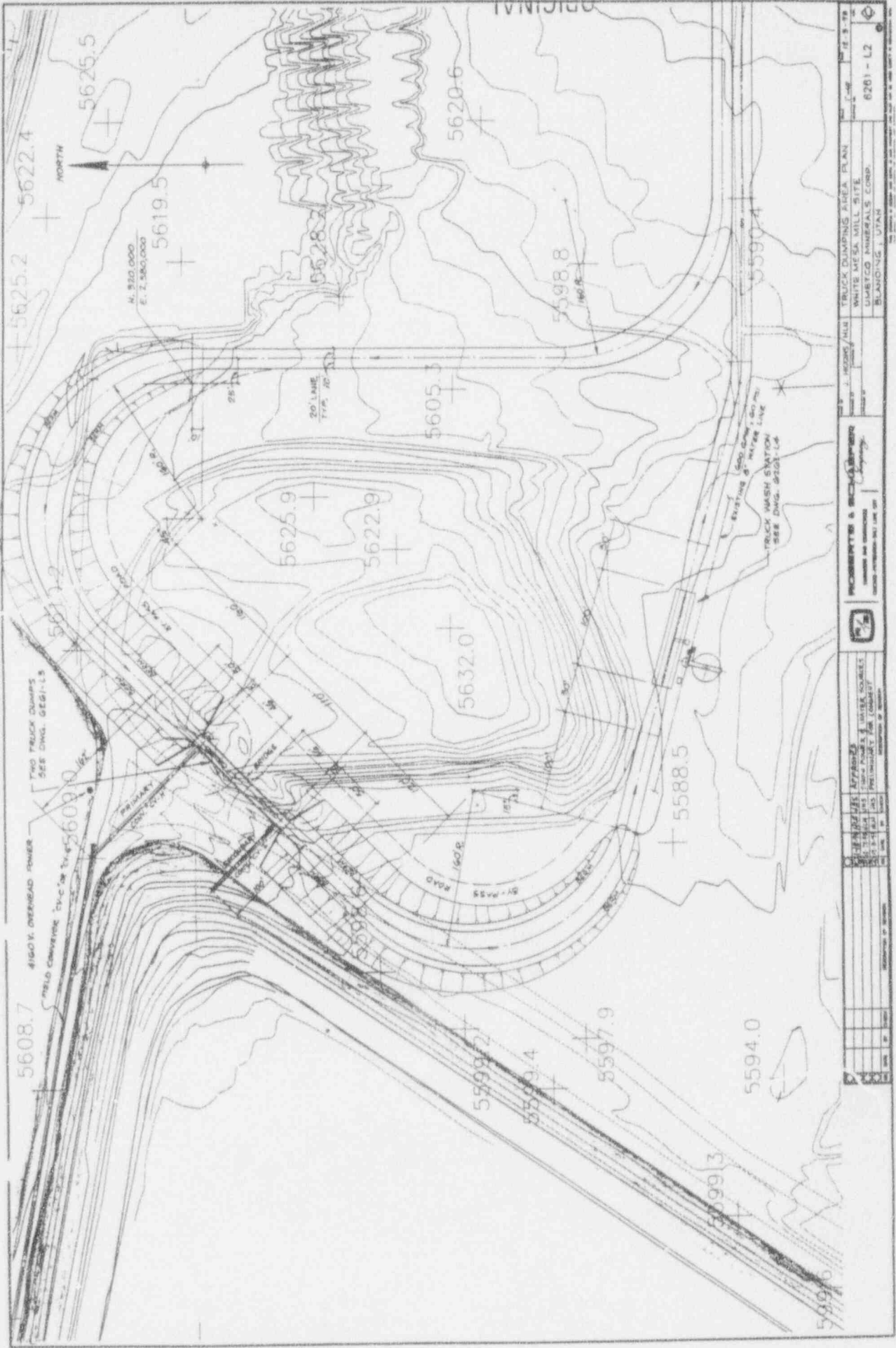
NOTE: EITHER ONE OF TWO PORTABLE GRASSHOPPERS OR ONE PORTABLE GRASSHOPPER AND ONE PORTABLE FEED CONVEYOR.

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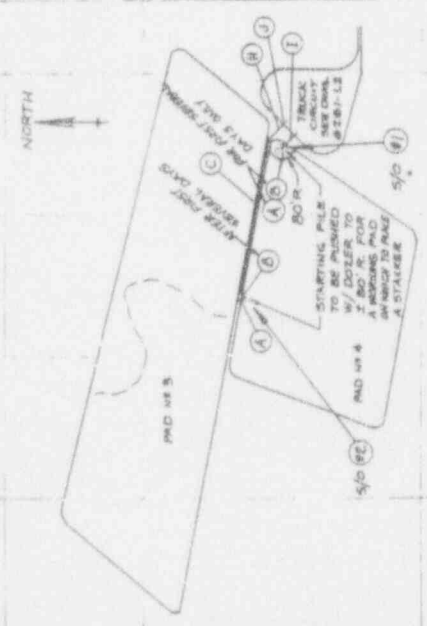
NOTE: EITHER ONE OF TWO PORTABLE GRASSHOPPERS OR ONE PORTABLE GRASSHOPPER AND ONE PORTABLE FEED CONVEYOR.

DATE	11-10-51
BY	W. H. HERRICK
PROJECT	WHITE MESA MILL SITE
CLIENT	UMETCO MINERALS CORP.
LOCATION	BLANDING, UTAH
6261-FS1	

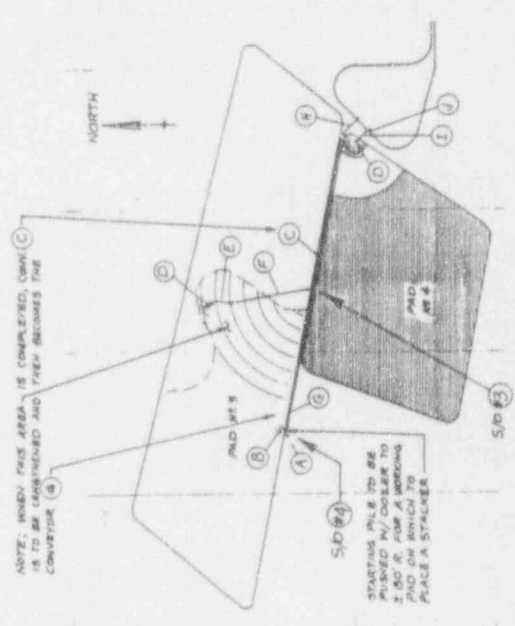


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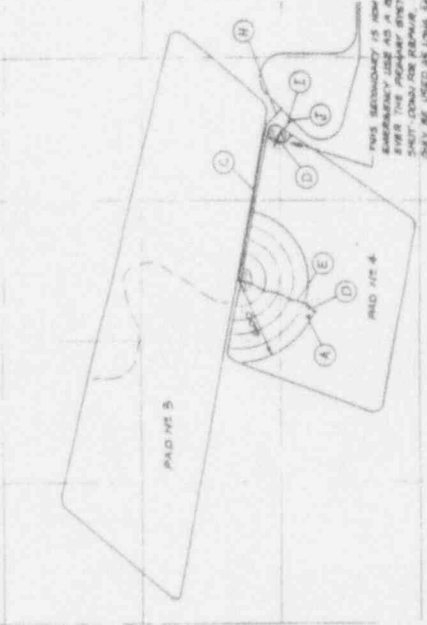
PROJECT: J. HODGINS MILL TRUCK DUMPING AREA PLAN CLIENT: WHITE MESA MILL SITE DRAWING: UMETCO MINERALS CORP. LOCATION: BLANDING, UTAH	
DRAWING NO.: 6261-L2 DATE: 12-3-78	
DESIGNER: HICKENBERRY & ASSOCIATES CHECKED BY: [Signature] APPROVED BY: [Signature]	
SCALE: AS SHOWN SHEET NO.: 12 OF 12	



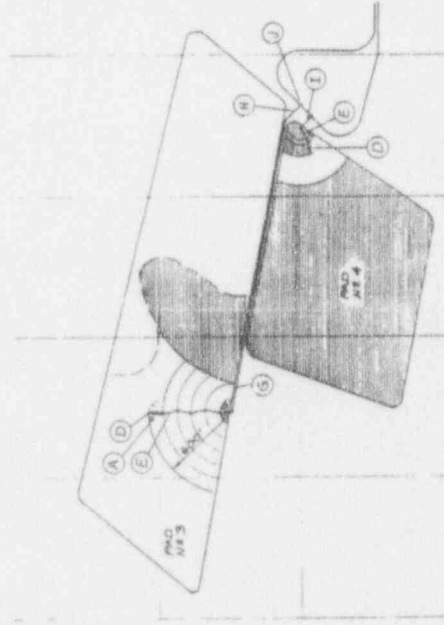
INITIAL SET-UP & 1ST SEASON START-UP



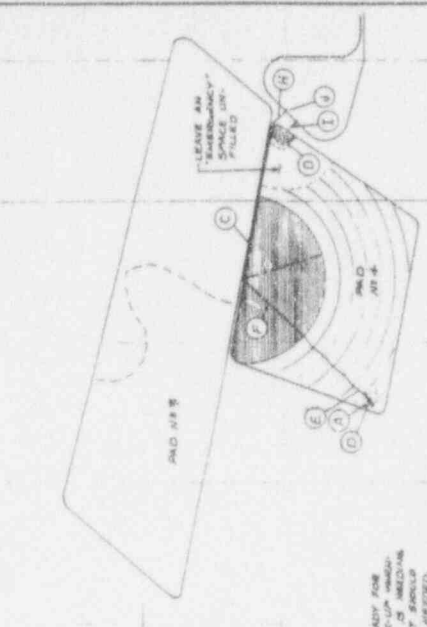
SECOND SEASON START-UP



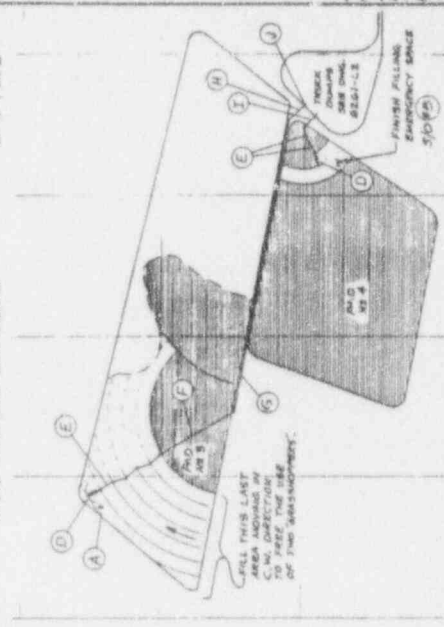
MID - FIRST SEASON



MID - SECOND SEASON



END FIRST SEASON



END SECOND SEASON

- A. (1) RILLDOZER
- B. (1) 40' STARTER PORTABLE EQUIP. #1 CV-B
- C. (1) 100' FIELD CONVEYOR STACKERS CV-C
- D. (1) 100' PORTABLE "SARASINOPACK" CONVEYORS CV-D-1 OR E
- E. (8) 100' PORTABLE "SARASINOPACK" CONVEYORS CV-E
- F. (1) 600' FOLDABLE FIELD CONVEYOR CV-F
- G. (1) 1000' FIELD CONVEYOR CV-G
- H. (1) PRIMARY FEED CONVEYOR CV-H
- I. (1) SECONDARY FEED CONVEYOR CV-I
- J. (1) TRUCK DUMP BELT FEEDERS CV-J-1 OR E

- SEQUENCE OF OPERATION
- (A) BUILD A MARKING PAD FOR EMERGENCY OPERATION.
 - (B) PROCEED TO FILL PAD #4 (1ST SEASON).
 - (C) START 2ND SEASON TO FILL EAST END OF PAD #3.
 - (D) BUILD A WORKING PAD AND PROCEED TO FILL PAD #3.
 - (E) JUST PRIOR TO COMPLETION OF PROJECT, FILL THE EMERGENCY SPACE.
 - (F) (G) (H) (I) (J)

ORIGINAL

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF REVISION	BY	APPROVED	DATE	REVISION
			ROBERTS & SCHAEFFER ENGINEERS AND ARCHITECTS 200 WEST 10TH AVENUE DENVER, COLORADO 80202		
PLACEHOLD PLANS WHITE MESA MILL SITE UNITED MINERALS CORP. Blanding, UTAH			7-400 13-11-73 6261-15		

