Audio Transcription

In the Matter of: The Application	of)	Docket No.
Snake River Oil and Gas, LLC to)	CC-2-23-OGR-01001
integrate unleased mineral interest)	Application for
owners, in the spacing unit)	Integration
consisting of Section 24, Township	8)	
North, Range 5 West, Boise Meridian	,)	
Payette County, Idaho.)	
Snake River Oil and Gas, LLC,)	
Applicant.)	

TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDED HEARING

TO DETERMINE "JUST AND REASONABLE" FACTORS

DATE OF HEARING, MARCH 14, 2023

REPORTED BY:
MARY (RAINEY) STOCKTON, CSR No. 746
Notary Public

Page 2 Page 4 APPEARANCES 1 1 person with a virtual component via Zoom. This hearing 2 Michael Thomas, Hearing Officer 2 is being recorded on Zoom as required by IDAPA 3 3 04.11.01.651. We also have a back-up recording device 4 Mike Christian, Attorney for Applicant 4 recording the hearing. 5 Those of you on Zoom, please mute your 6 James Piotrowski, Attorney for CAIA and other property 6 microphones until you are called on. Please speak 7 owners 7 loudly and clearly when it is your turn. If there is a 8 disturbance, you'll be reminded to mute your microphone. 9 J. Kahle Becker, Attorney for Jordan and Dana Gross If the disturbance continues, you may be muted and/or 10 and Little Buddy Farm, LLC disconnected. 11 For those appearing in person, it is important 11 12 J.J. Winters, Deputy Attorney General for the Idaho 12 you identify yourself by stating your name for the 13 Department of Lands record before you speak. 14 If you are here as a representative, please 15 15 indicate your own name; as well as who you are representing. 16 I may ask clarifying questions while you 17 17 18 18 When you come up, if you're in person, I move 19 19 20 the podium right here so folks on Zoom could maybe see. 20 It looks like we've lost the video again; so 21 21 22 I'll bring that back. You could be speaking to someone 22 other than me. Let's see if I can do that. There you 23 24 go. 24 As my January 31, 2023 Notice indicates, this 25 25

Page 3

Page 5

THE HEARING PROCEEDED AS FOLLOWS:

- 3 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Folks, thank you for
- 4 your patience. We're recording today's Zoom meeting;
- 5 and I'm also using an audio recorder as a back-up.
- 6 We're now on the recording for Docket No.
- 7 CC-2023-OGR-01-001.
- 8 It's 9:04 A.M., Tuesday, March 14, 2023.
- 9 We are at the Fruitland City Hall in
- 10 Fruitland, Idaho.

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- This is the time set for hearing to address
- 12 the scope of the factors I'll consider when determining
- 13 whether the terms and conditions of an integration order
- 14 are just and reasonable as provided in Idaho Code
- 15 47-320, Sub 1 for the spacing unit consisting of
- 16 Section 24, Township 8 North, Range 5 West, Boise
- 17 Meridian, Payette County, Idaho.
- My name is Mick Thomas and I am the Oil and
- 19 Gas Division Administrator presiding over and conducting
- 20 the hearing pursuant to Idaho Code 47-328.
- Before I continue, I want to let everyone know
- 22 that I have reviewed all the briefs and comments. I
- 23 give equal weight to written and oral comments and
- 24 arguments.

25

Here's some housekeeping. This hearing is in

- 1 hearing was noticed to address the scope of factors to
- 2 determine just or reasonable terms to be determined just
- 3 and reasonable.
- 4 The purpose of this hearing is not to address
- 5 what terms are, in fact, just and reasonable. That is a
- 6 question for a future evidentiary hearing held at a
- 7 later date.
- 8 I have allowed briefing and submittal of
- 9 affidavits on the issues of the scope of factors used to
- 10 determine just and reasonable and the hearing was
- 11 noticed to take only argument.
- 12 I want to, again, clarify that the deadline
- 13 for uncommitted owners to respond to the application has
- 14 not passed. They can still participate in future
- 15 evidentiary hearings on the integration application.
- 16 Witnesses and evidence may be submitted at the future
- 17 evidentiary hearing.
- With that, I'd like to first take appearances.
- Mr. Christian, will you please identify
- 20 yourself and who you represent for the record?
- MR. CHRISTIAN: Michael Christian here for the
- 22 applicant, Snake River Oil and Gas, Mr. Administrator.
- 23 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you.
- Mr. Becker, could you please identify yourself
- 25 and who you represent? You don't have to stand up, if

Page 6

- 1 you don't want to.
- 2 MR. BECKER: Kahle Becker representing Jordan
- 3 Gross, Dana Gross and Little Buddy Farm, LLC.
- 4 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you.
- 5 Mr. Piotrowski, can you please identify
- 6 yourself and who you represent?
- 7 MR. PIOTROWSKI: James Piotrowski on behalf of
- 8 Joey Ishida, Brenda Ishida, Juanita Lopez, Sarah
- 9 Weatherspoon, David George, Jessica Ishida Sanchez, Juan
- 10 Sanchez, Jr., Gary Hale, Ryan Gentry, Mark Vidlak, and
- 11 Mary Ann Miller; as well as Citizens Allied for
- 12 Integrity and Accountability.
- 13 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr.
- 14 Piotrowski.
- 15 Ms. Winters, can you please identify yourself
- 16 and who you represent?
- 17 MS. WINTERS: Good morning, Mr. Hearing
- 18 Officer. My name's J.J. Winters, Deputy Attorney
- 19 General and appearing on behalf of the Idaho Department
- 20 of Lands.
- 21 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you.
- Are there any other uncommitted mineral
- 23 interest owners in the proposed unit that plan on
- 24 participating today? All right.
- Next, I'd like to insure all parties

- 1 February 21, '23, Kahle Becker Motion to
- 2 Continue, Reply Brief.
- 3 February 22, '23, James Piotrowski on behalf
- 4 of Citizens Allied for Integrity and Accountability;
- 5 Joey Ishida, Brenda Ishida, Juanita Lopez, Sarah
- 6 Weatherspoon, David George, Jessica Ishida Sanchez, Juan
- 7 Sanchez, Jr., Gary Hale, Ryan Gentry, Mark Vidlak, and
- 8 Mary Ann Miller. And a Brief of Nonconsenting Owners in
- **9** Support of Motion to Continue.
- February 22, '23, the Order Continuing the
- 11 Opening Brief deadline.
- February 24, '23, the Applicant E-mail
- 13 Response. Newly Leased Mineral Interest Owners.
- February 28, '23, the Idaho Department of
- 15 Lands Opening Brief.
- February 28, '23, James Piotrowski Opening
- 17 Brief.
- March 1st, '23, the Applicant Opening Brief.
- March 1st, '23, the Applicant Motion of
- 20 Applicant Per Order Determining CAIA is not a Party.
- March 1st, '23, Kahle Becker Opening Brief.
- March 6, '23, Kahle Becker Response Brief and
- 23 Motion for Disqualification.
- March 8th, '23, the Applicant Response Brief.
- March 10th, '23, the Applicant Opposition to

Page 7 Page 9

- 1 understand what documents are in the record.
- 2 Documents in the record are Docket No.
- 3 CC-2023-OGR-01-001 are on the OGCC website at:
- 4 Ogcc.idaho.gov/administrative-hearings.
- 5 I also have a copy of listed documents for the
- 6 record orally.
- 7 January 23, 2023, Application of Integration
- 8 with Exhibits A through L.
- 9 January 23, 2023, Idaho Department of Lands
- 10 Acknowledgment of Application.
- January 30, '23, the Affidavit of Publication
- 12 or Notes of Intent and Certified Mailing Receipts.
- January 31st, 2023, Order Vacating Hearing and
- 14 Notice of Hearing to determine Just and Reasonable
- 15 Factors.
- February 1st, '23, Affidavit of Publication.
- February 9, '23, Comments from Mary Ann
- 18 Miller.
- February 17, '23, Kahle Becker on behalf of
- 20 Jordan A. and Dana C. Gross and Little Buddy Farms, LLC,
- 21 Notice of Appearance and Motion to Continue.
- February 17, '23, the Applicant Response to
- 23 Motion to Continue.
- February 21, '23, Comment from Sarah
- 25 Weatherspoon.

- 1 Motion for Disqualification.
- 2 March 13th, '23, Kahle Becker Reply Brief.
- 3 March 13th, '23, the Applicant Reply Brief.
- 4 Again, all of this material is on the OGCC's
- 5 website.
- 6 In addition to the briefing on factors to be
- 7 used to determine the just and reasonable terms today, I
- 8 received a March 6th, '23 Motion to Disqualify the
- **9** Hearing Officer filed by the Grosses.
- Snake River's counsel provided a written
- 11 response to the Motion.
- 12 I did not receive any additional related
- 13 Motions or responses from other parties.
- Under IDAPA 04.11.01-565 when a pre-hearing
- 15 Motion is filed, all parties seeking similar relief must
- 16 join in the Motion or file a similar Motion within seven
- 17 days after receiving the original Motion.
- Seven days have passed since the Motion was
- 19 filed; however, parties responding to the Motion will
- 20 have 14 days from the time of filing of the Motion for21 lack of responding.
- Given that Motion relates to whether I can act
- 23 as the presiding officer over the hearing, and it was
- 24 only filed on March 6th, I'll begin by offering all
- 25 parties an opportunity for oral argument on that Motion.

This oral argument will be before our just and

- 2 reasonable section of this hearing.
- 3 And I'll allow everyone to speak for up to
- 4 five minutes.
- Mr. Becker, since you filed the Motion, I'll
- 6 give you -- it's your Motion, so you can begin, if you'd
- 7 like. You're welcome to walk up.
- MR. BECKER: Thank you, Your Honor.
- 9 This is Kahle Becker for the Grosses and
- 10 Little Buddy Farm.
- 11 As the Hearing Officer pointed out, we filed a
- 12 Motion for Disqualification.
- Our concern is that the State is an interested
- 14 and perhaps adverse party due to its ownership and
- 15 management of a Trust resource for the State of Idaho.
- 16 Namely, the navigable Payette River, which cuts across
- 17 the middle of the proposed integration unit.
- I've requested, pursuant to Idaho's Public
- 19 Records Request laws, copies of documents related to any
- 20 lease or any sort of financial arrangement that has been
- 21 entered into between the State and the Applicant.
- 22 Since this Integration Order looks to the type
- 23 of arrangements that have been entered into between
- 24 other integrated parties, who chose to be integrated
- 25 voluntarily, I think the State's lease is certainly

- 1 It was filed beyond 14 days after you appeared on the
- 2 scene as the Hearing Officer via your January 31st
- 3 Notice of Hearing and was not filed promptly following
- 4 the availability of the facts on which it relies.
- 5 I'm not going to go through every detail of
- 6 that, but it's in my briefing.
- 7 I think it's also -- it's meritless on the
- 8 substance. The point made in the Motion itself in the
- 9 briefs submitted by the Grosses was that there is a
- conflict of interest because you oversee the leasing of
- 11 State minerals, which isn't the case. A completely
- 12 different person within the Department of Lands under a
- 13 different supervisor is responsible for State leasing.
- 14 So, there's a division of interest. And there hasn't
- 15 been any evidence provided that you have any personal
- 16 animus or bias.
- And, finally, you -- you are not a generic
- 18 Hearing Officer to be disqualified and replaced. The
- 19 Statute specifically provides that the Administrator of
- 20 the oil and gas program is to decide integration
- 21 applications.
- So, for those reasons -- and, again, as is set
- 23 forth in our briefing -- we would request that you deny
- 24 the Motion for Disqualification.
- 25 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr.

Page 11

Page 13

Hearing March 14, 2023

- 1 something that would impact the determination of some of
- 2 the issues that are put forth by the Advocate here.
- 3 So, I'm still waiting for a response to my
- 4 public records request; but out of an abundance of
- 5 caution, we felt that it would be best to have a new
- 6 Hearing Officer appointed in this particular situation
- ${\bf 7}\;$ so that the public can have confidence that the person
- 8 who's deciding their case has not negotiated a financial
- 9 arrangement with the Applicant that actually puts them
- 10 in an adverse situation to other parties who are being 11 compelled to be integrated in this particular unit.
- 12 Again, our concern is simply public confidence
- 13 in the process and insuring that all parties have due
- 14 process and that this is a completely transparent
- 15 process for the citizens in the State of Idaho. Thank
- **16** you.
- 17 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr.
- 18 Becker.
- Mr. Christian, you did file a response brief
- 20 to this. If you would like to provide any testimony at
- 21 this time, you're welcome to.
- MR. CHRISTIAN: Thank you, Mr. Administrator.
- Briefly, I've really already pointed out in
- 24 the brief the two main points.
- One: Our view is that the Motion is untimely.

- 1 Christian.
- 2 Are there any other parties who would like to
- 3 offer argument on this?
- 4 MR. PIOTROWSKI: Mr. Thomas, I'd like to be
- 5 heard on this.
- 6 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr.
- 7 Piotrowski. Go ahead.
- 8 MR. PIOTROWSKI: Thank you. In addition to
- 9 the grounds that go to disqualification in the Gross's
- 10 Motion, there is even a larger and more substantial
- 11 basis for disqualification of the Hearing Officer in the
- 12 case. It has nothing to do with personal animus or
- 13 bias. Mr. Christian's vote is on the wrong issue.
- What it has to do with is institutional bias.
- 15 The Oil and Gas Commission, which is a part of the
- 16 Department of Lands, of which you are the Administrator,
- 17 have a compulsion, a statutory compulsion to encourage
- 18 the rapid development of oil and gas resources. This is
- 19 your job as a matter of Idaho law.
- To then have you sit as the Hearing Officer
- 21 over the terms of your wish how those items will be
- 22 divided, creates the tremendous appearance -- at least
- 23 the appearance; and the likely actuality of
- 24 institutional bias.
- You cannot tell us what is just and reasonable

Page 17

Page 14

- 1 when your job is to drill, baby, drill.
- 2 You cannot tell us that you have taken
- 3 appropriate depth to insure the right of all interested
- 4 parties when your statutory command is to get the
- 5 hydrocarbons out.
- 6 And as a result, this process is fundamentally
- 7 unfair, fundamentally violates due process of law and
- 8 fundamentally represents the wrong decision-maker of
- 9 this case.
- 10 If the appearance of impartiality matters,
- 11 then the decision-maker should not be an entity who's
- 12 statutorily commanded to approve integration and
- 13 drilling and extraction.
- 14 It should, instead, be a neutral third-party
- 15 who understands that these are merely business decisions
- 16 to be made.
- And, yet, this system, which include the party
- 18 that's -- that works for an interested party, isn't
- 19 accomplishing that.
- 20 I believe we should find a neutral Hearing
- 21 Officer for these cases starting with this one and going
- 22 forward
- 23 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr.
- 24 Piotrowski.
- Ms. Vega, do you have any argument at this

- 1 within the Idaho Department of Lands, these matters
- 2 remain separate.
- 3 My client, Mr. Thumb, (Phonetic) and I'm sure
- 4 Mr. Thomas, take great care to place the required
- 5 screens between them.
- 6 Neither entity created the statutory
- 7 arrangement but all take it very seriously and will
- 8 continue to follow the law as it is written.
- 9 Mr. Thomas, with his experience in the oil and
- 10 gas industry, is a preferred Hearing Officer for the
- 11 very reason of his experience.
- To imply that either the Department or the
- 13 State or any member of the Commission is anything but
- 14 fair and impartial is unfortunate.
- 15 It is the Department's vote that this hearing
- 16 and any upcoming hearings and briefings be conducted
- 17 with professionalism and respect. Thank you.
- 18 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Ms.
- 19 Winters.
- 20 Are there any other parties who would like to
- 21 provide arguments on this? All right.
- Mr. Becker, you can offer any final rebuttal,
- 23 if you would like.
- MR. BECKER: I just want to address the
- 25 timeliness here.

- 1 time?
- MS. VEGA: Thank you, Mr. Thomas. Just a
- 3 reminder, I'm just observing this morning. I don't
- 4 intend to participate.
- 5 But maybe Ms. Winters has some comments on
- 6 behalf of the Department of Lands.
- 7 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Ms. Vega.
- 8 I misread the script at the bottom of the picture. I
- 9 apologize.
- Ms. Winters, do you have any comments at this
- **11** time?
- MS. WINTERS: Briefly, Mr. Hearing Officer.
- 13 As you indicated, the Department of Lands filed an
- 14 opening brief in the Just and Reasonable, but did not
- 15 necessarily address the Motion to Disqualify.
- After reading the briefing and considering the
- 17 filings, the Department would just like to make a
- 18 statement on the record that it is disappointed in the
- 19 accusatory tone in which some of the briefing has been
- 20 written.
- It is unfortunate that the Department has to
- 22 defend the integrity of the Department and the Oil and
- 23 Gas Commission; both of which are separate legal
- 24 entities created by Statute.
- 25 Although the Oil and Gas Commission is housed

- 1 As the Hearing Officer is aware, the Statute
- 2 gave some extremely tight time frames here. And the
- 3 Statute for disqualification also does have some time
- 4 frames, but it also has a general provision regarding
- 5 discovery of factors that may indicate potential grounds
- 6 for disqualification; such as, those as you've indicated
- 7 here.
- 8 I think what's lost in Mr. Christian's
- 9 arguments is the fact that the average citizen who
- 10 receives this giant packet of information for an
- 11 Applicant, to extract hydrocarbons that have sat under
- 12 the earth for hundreds of thousands of years, millions
- 13 of years; all the sudden it's placed on this fast track
- 14 "you've got to get it done right now."
- This is a big deal to these people who are all
- 16 of the sudden forced with the prospect of staring at a
- 17 drill rig for the next -- or drilling operation for the
- 18 next 30 years. To consider terms of leases that are in
- 19 fine print and dozens of pages long, this is a lot for
- 20 someone to digest.
- In this situation, Mr. Christian points out
- 22 dates at which his Applicant did certain things.
- 23 It then takes time for things to get mailed
- 24 out to the parties who are being told that they're about
- 25 to be integrated under terms that Mr. Christian's

Page 18

- 1 clients think are fair without providing much
- 2 information for the people to be integrated to consider.
- In this particular case, my client went to his
- 4 long-time attorney. And after dealing with that, a
- 5 replacement attorney within that office, then all of the
- 6 sudden was informed that, in fact, his long-time
- 7 attorney represented Mr. Christian's client. And so,
- 8 that created a bit of a delay.
- 9 My client then searched out another attorney
- 10 who had some experience in mineral extraction underneath
- 11 Idaho's ground, some experience in administrative law
- 12 practice and we were able to connect and sign an
- 13 engagement letter.
- 14 There's a lot to digest and consider in a
- 15 short amount of time. And realizing that: Hey, there's
- 16 navigable waterway that traverses this unit and look
- 17 into the statutes and rules that then allow one to
- 18 realize that the State potentially has an interest -- a
- 19 monetary interest, as well as a regulatory interest in
- 20 this particular integration unit.
- I think it requires a lot of connecting the
- 22 dots that, frankly, the average attorney wouldn't have
- 23 put together.
- 24 Here I was able to connect those dots. I did
- 25 so in as quick as time as reasonably possible. I am

- 1 confidence that the government is working for all of
- 2 these people; and not simply the Applicant. Thank you.
- 3 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr.
- 4 Becker.
- 5 After the arguments I've heard, I am deciding
- 6 not to disqualify myself as the Hearing Officer.
- 7 I'll just tell you this orally. The Gross's
- 8 cite that the navigable waterways and the integration
- 9 unit means that I am not a disinterested party.
- I do not supervise or administer the oil and
- 11 gas mineral leases in the Department -- for the
- 12 Department of Lands in the State. That is a different
- 13 division entirely.
- 14 I don't have any knowledge about what those
- 15 specifically lease terms are.
- There are no facts indicating that I am bias,
- 17 prejudice interest or substantial prior involvement in
- 18 the matter other than as a presiding Officer.
- 19 The request also appears to be untimely as my
- 20 employment and job titles were included on the Notice of
- 21 Hearing issued well over 14 days before the Motion and
- 22 the Grosses do not indicate what new facts were
- 23 discovered later.
- The Notice of Hearing was issued January 31st
- 25 and the Gross's attorney appeared on February 17, '23.

Page 19

- 1 still waiting for actual leases or documentation as to
- 2 what the financial arrangement is between the Department
- 3 of Lands and Snake River Oil and Gas. I still don't
- 4 have those documents because of the time frames under
- 5 the Public Records Request Act.
- 6 So, we have moved diligently here. I
- 7 immediately notified the Hearing Officer once I
- 8 connected those dots here.
- 9 And -- and, frankly, with all due respect, to
- 10 the Department of Lands, I think it's something that
- 11 should have been pointed out in their opening brief.
- Again, in the interest of full disclosure
- 13 here, that they're not simply a regulatory function, but
- 14 they are an interested party in this particular
- 15 situation.
- So, again, I'm not trying to be accusatory
- 17 here; but, you know, this is government works fast when
- 18 it's transparent and the people understand how their
- 19 decisions are being made by the elected officials and
- 20 those that are paid for with tax dollars.
- And so, again, we're interested in
- 22 transparency. We're seeking transparency through a
- 23 Public Records Request.
- We feel that having an independent Hearing
- 25 Officer in this situation is going to provide that

- Finally, Idaho Code 47-328, Sub 3, Sub D
- 2 expressly provides that the Administrator shall hear the
- 3 application and make a decision.
- 4 In the event I decided to hire a Hearing
- 5 Officer, I am still statutorily asked as the
- 6 Administrator to issue the order.
- 7 While I am -- finally, while I am ruling on
- 8 this Motion orally now, I will follow up with a written
- 9 decision stating the facts and reasons for my
- 10 determination pursuant to Idaho Code 67-5252, Sub 3.
- 11 All rıght.
- Switching gears. Let's turn to the hearing
- 13 topic of the scope of factors used to determine just and
- 14 reasonable
- The purpose of this hearing is not to address
- 16 which terms are, in fact, just and reasonable. That is
- 17 a question for a future evidentiary hearing at a later
- 18 date.
- 19 I have allowed briefing and submittal of
- 20 affidavits on the issues of the scope of factors used to
- 21 determine just and reasonable in the hearing, as
- 22 noticed, state only argument.
- So, we'll proceed with oral arguments at this
- 24 hearing.
- 25 I will first hear arguments from the

Page 22

- 1 Applicant, Snake River.
- 2 This will be followed by arguments from Mr.
- 3 Piotrowski.
- 4 This will be followed with arguments by Mr.
- 5 Becker.
- 6 Afterward, I accept -- I will accept arguments
- 7 from the Idaho Department of Lands.
- 8 Then other uncommitted owners, if they are
- 9 present.
- Then Snake River will have an opportunity for
- 11 rebuttal.
- 12 Arguments for each party will be limited to 10
- 13 minutes.
- 14 After argument is complete, I will accept
- 15 public comments. I will limit these comments to five
- 16 minutes. I'll first take public comment from those
- 17 appearing in person; and then I'll take comment from
- 18 anyone on Zoom.
- So, with that, I would invite Mr. Christian to
- 20 provide argument at this time.
- MR. CHRISTIAN: Thank you, Mr. Administrator.
- 22 You have the Applicants' proposed factors for
- 23 consideration. We set them forth both in the
- 24 application and I think they're listed in the briefing.
- As you're aware, the Administrator's found

- 1 It's not to determine whether discovery is
- 2 permitted; although, the Act expressly says it is not --
- 3 it is not to determine whether to halt the matter
- 4 entirely or refer it in some unspecified fashion to a
- 5 District Court.
- 6 It is not to determine whether integration
- 7 should be denied outright.
- 8 It is not to determine whether, I doubt, that
- 9 20-0702 is in effect; although it is.
- 10 It is not to consider specific terms and
- 11 conditions of integration; such as, royalty rate or
- 12 bonding or surface use or any other specific condition.
- 13 I'm going to pass over the subject of the
- 14 tenor of the briefing. I think Ms. Winters addressed it
- 15 well.
- On the substance, to the extent that they have
- 17 anything to do with establishing factors to be
- 18 considered, the cases regarding rate setting by
- 19 regulated public utilities that the Grosses rely pretty
- 20 heavily upon -- and I think Mr. Piotrowski may have in
- 21 the past -- are not relevant.
- The Act here is not concerned with
- 23 establishing a rate of return on invested capital as the
- 24 laws and regulations for regulated utilities are.
- 25 It's concerned with balancing correlative

Page 23

- 1 those factors to be appropriate in three previous
- 2 integration proceedings.
- 3 The Applicant has indicated that it's not
- 4 aware of any circumstances in Section 24 that would make
- 5 it any different from any other previous integration;
- ${f 6}$ such that those factors should be changed or not used.
- 7 Neither of the groups objecting mineral owners
- 8 have offered any evidence that Section 24 is different
- 9 in any way.
- 10 I'm not going to spend further time repeating
- 11 my briefing on that subject or your previous orders back
- 12 to you.
- But as you've previously found, the factors
- 14 are within the authority of the Commission. They do not
- 15 impose burdens, conditions or restrictions in excess of
- 16 or inconsistent with existing statutory provisions; and
- 17 they comply with Commission rules.
- And, finally, they're consistent with the
- 19 purposes of the Act, which is to encourage development,
- 20 protect correlative rights and prevent waste.
- 21 As you've noted per your Notice of Hearing,
- 22 the purpose of this proceeding is for the parties to
- 23 propose factors to be considered in the later merits
- 24 hearing in determining just and reasonable terms of
- 25 integration.

- 1 rights and preventing waste and encouraging the
- 2 development of oil and gas resources in the State of
- 3 Idaho while doing so.
- 4 Working interest owners and committed royalty
- 5 owners have entirely different interests in regulated
- 6 utilities.
- 7 You know, one is interested in earning a fair,
- 8 but essentially guaranteed, rate of return on invested
- 9 capital while occupying government sanctioned monopoly
- 10 position.
- 11 The other is interested in maximizing
- 12 efficient production in the non-monopoly position while
- 13 balancing the correlative rights of others.
- 14 Several of the issues that are argued,
- 15 particularly by Grosses are, again, irrelevant for the
- 16 purposes of this proceeding.
- 17 The Statute does not permit discovery in
- 18 integration proceedings. This is recognized in both
- 19 DAPA and the HE's rules that discovery's allowed only
- 20 when permitted by the Statute and that's not the case
- 21 here.
- There is no due process requirement of
- 23 discovery in every administrative proceeding.
- 24 The driver's license case -- suspension case
- 25 cited by the Grosses is not relevant. It does not say

1 that discovery was required in every administrative

- 2 proceeding and it involved a scheme or issuance of
- 3 subpoenas that was already allowed as part of the
- 4 defined due process. This is true on a number of 5 points.
- But if the Grosses think that this should be 6
- 7 changed for integration -- or anybody else does -- they
- 8 need to take it up with the Legislature.
- Hundreds of owners have voluntarily leased;
- 10 and millions have around the country. And markets have
- 11 been established without such process, without the
- 12 operating of providing unfettered access to its books
- and records.
- Likewise, if the Grosses -- or any other party
- 15 -- think that the rates set for deemed lease owners --
- 16 which, by the way, is both equal to the prevailing rate
- 17 in Section 24 in the basin, generally; and consistent
- with the rate set by Statute in other states -- if they
- 19 think that it needs to be different, again, they need to
- 20 take it up with the Legislature.
- If they think that there is evidence that 21
- 22 market -- the market for lease royalty rates is
- different than Snake River has suggested, they can
- 24 present that evidence at the merits hearing when it's
- 25 scheduled.

- 1 do with royalty rates for integrated owners. It doesn't
- 2 contradict the market evidence already presented by the
- Applicant.
- Secondly, the lobbying information about the
- 5 \$250, the Idaho Petroleum Marketers Association gave to
- 6 Representative Boyle's campaign, is irrelevant to the
- selection of factors to be considered.
- In any case, the Petroleum Marketers 8
- Association is not the gas industry. It's the trade
- group that represents gas station owners. So, whatever
- 11 the Grosses think it might show, it doesn't.
- Lastly, the December 22, 2022 production 12
- 13 report -- that I think they've attached to one of their
- 14 last briefs -- you know, really in the Applicants' view
- 15 should be a cause for celebration. There were
- abnormally high prices for a very short period; and as a
- 17 result, royalty owners are going to receive bigger
- checks; and the State is going to receive more severance
- taxes because the Applicant generated more revenue.
- That is the way it works. 20
- But that single report is not evidence that 21
- Snake River has done or will do anything unfair toward
- 23 the owners.
- Lastly, the constitutional arguments that the 24
- 25 opposing owners raise repeatedly are not issues for you

Page 27

Page 29

Hearing

- This is not the time and place for arguing
- 2 about specific terms and conditions in integration;
- 3 whether it's bonding levels or prohibition of surface
- 4 use or prohibition of flurring or limitation to a single
- 5 well or compensation beyond what the integration Statute
- 6 provides for. Those are not factors to consider their
- 7 outcomes.
- The factors that the Applicant has proposed
- 9 for consideration already allow for a party to present
- evidence on those subjects and make the case for why
- circumstances, whatever they may be of Section 24, where
- 12 the proposed operations relative to their property calls
- 13 for changed terms and conditions.
- Regarding the -- I'll say one more thing. 14
- What the Grosses seem to argue is that a market -- they
- argue repeatedly that Snake River wants to impose
- submarket rates, but they seem to be arguing if the
- market is a rate and provisions that provide maximal
- protections to uncommitted mineral owners and a royalty
- that's based on externalities other than the value of
- 21 the oil and gas produced. But that's not a market
- 22 value.
- 23 Regarding the items that are attached to the
- 24 Gross's briefing, the article advocating for higher
- 25 royalty rates in State leases doesn't have anything to

- 1 to decide or that you even have the authority to decide.
- But I will point out what they are arguing for
- 3 is far in excess of what Judge Winmill ordered in the
- 4 CAIA versus Schultz case. And I would argue that we are
- 5 here because this process is already far in excess of
- 6 what he ordered. He ordered only that the Department
- 7 specify factors before the merits hearing so the parties
- 8 would know what types of evidence to bring. He
- 9 specifically found that the process would not be delayed
- 10 because that was all in his ordering. That hasn't
- 11 turned out to be the case.
- The objecting owners are receiving more 12
- 13 process than that; several rounds of briefing, oral
- In other words, up to three or four 15
- 16 opportunities to be heard and to tell you what they
- think the factors ought to be.
- Of course they are entitled to be heard. This 18
- 19 doesn't mean that they're entitled to turn every
- proceeding into a full-blown lawsuit. 20
- No other State does it that way. In other 21
- 22 States, more limited processes have been upheld against
- 23 challenges for many decades.
- I am not going to repeat from my briefing 24
- 25 again why the factors that the Applicant has proposed

- 1 are appropriate because you've already issued multiple
- 2 orders under similar circumstances and I think your
- 3 reasoning in those orders is sound.
- 4 So, with that, I'm happy to stand for
- 5 questions. Otherwise, I will speak in rebuttal.
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr.
- Christian. I reserve the right to ask questions later
- 8 during your rebuttal. I don't have any questions at
- this time.
- Mr. Piotrowski, I invite you to provide any 10
- 11 arguments you would like.
- MR. PIOTROWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Thomas. 12
- After just being lectured that it was not the 13
- 14 time and place to discuss what's actually just and
- reasonable, Mr. Christian spent a lot of time discussing
- what's just and reasonable. And I wish we would have a
- little more consistency in the position taken by all
- parties in this process.
- Because, for instance, the purpose we are here 19
- 20 for today is to determine what would be necessary for
- you, the Hearing Officer, to set terms that are just and
- 22 reasonable.
- I would start that, number one, is the ability
- 24 to not integrate. If Snake River Oil and Gas is
- 25 guaranteed integration, then this process cannot yield

- 1 the royalty rate. This is a financial transaction.
- 2 Snake River Oil and Gas is in the business to make

Hearing March 14, 2023

Page 32

- money, period, end of sentence, done.
- They are not performing a public service.
- 5 They are not interested in the right of mineral owners.
- They are in this to make money.
- And the suggestion that we will not address
- the royalty rate at all means that this cannot be a 8
- process for setting just and reasonable terms.
- Because the most important just and reasonable
- 11 terms in any compelled sale are what's being sold and
- what's being paid for. And, yet, you've had the ability
- to adjust royalty rates taken away from you.
- So, again, Mr. Hearing Officer, either write a
- 15 decision that says you can't set just and reasonable
- rates because your hands have been tied; or adjust the
- royalty rate. Find authority to adjust the royalty 17
- 18
- In a prior case, you concluded that you had 19
- 20 some power to adjust royalty rate in the leases; a power
- you have not ever exercised, a power that we don't think
- 22 exists. Because in a lease -- a lease, by definition,
- is a transaction between two individuals.
- Now, if you can adjust private contracts, that 24
- 25 would be an interesting outcome. Private contracts are

Page 31 Page 33

- 1 just and reasonable terms.
- If there is no option to not integrate, then
- 3 we're here spinning our wheels because you're going to
- 4 integrate. And that violates due process. It violates
- 5 notions of fairness and it absolutely violates the idea
- 6 that the terms must be just and reasonable.
- Because if there are not any just and
- 8 reasonable terms, you don't have the option to say, no,
- don't integrate, which means you are required to assume
- that there are just and reasonable terms. 10
- That's a rigged process. That is not a
- 12 reasonable process. It is the fact story process, I
- 13 realize. But it is a rigged process.
- As a Hearing Officer, under the Idaho 14
- Administrative Procedures Act, you are required to
- follow the law; not just the Statute that sets up your
- position; you are required to follow the law as it
- relates to this matter. 18
- And in this matter, it is possible that
- 20 integration is not warranted at all; but, yet, that is
- 21 not an option available to you.
- I would suggest either you make that option 22
- 23 available to you or admit that you can't set just and
- 24 reasonable terms. That's number one.
- 25 Two is: You need to have the power to adjust

- 1 already executed. I don't think you can do that.
- Your power sets terms for those who will be
- 3 offered leases, those who will be deem leased and those
- who will have other interests; but you cannot compel
- people to enter into leases. You can only deem them
- leased.
- Third, is you really ought to be limiting
- 8 integration. The pool that are disclosed -- the pools
- 9 of hydrocarbons that are disclosed by the application.
- You can't possibly know what are just and reasonable
- 11 term if we're talking about a pool in 10B; but you also
- 12 integrate the interest in a pool in 10D, which is
- 13 totally separate, doesn't -- may not even exist. If it
- 14 does exist, we don't know about it. We don't know its
- 15 size, we don't know its value.
- So, on the third -- or fourth thing --16
- 17 depending on how you count these -- what you want to do
- 18 is insure that integration is limited to what we
- absolutely know about today.
- Integrating unknown interests would be 20
- 21 literally impossible to set just and reasonable terms.
- But if there is -- I don't know -- 50,000 feet 22
- deep, there is a massive pool of crude oil, well, the
- 24 terms for that lease, the terms for that integration
- 25 would be vastly different from the terms of a small pool

1 of natural gas at 5,000 feet.

- 2 To accomplish this, you should require full
- 3 disclosure by both the Department of Lands and Snake
- 4 River Oil and Gas of all information in their possession
- 5 that would be likely to be relevant here.
- 6 That would include the extent of the pool, the
- 7 likelihood of recovery, forecasts or predictions of
- 8 market rate in the future.
- 9 While you can call it discovery, you can also
- 10 just call it the Hearing Officer exercising his
- 11 authority to insure that the proceeding is fair and
- 12 reasonable by ordering Snake River Oil and Gas to
- 3 disclose all of that information.
- 14 I'll call it discovery. Since Mr. Christian
- 15 has pointedly repeatedly told us there is no discovery
- 16 allowed, let's call it compelled disclosure.
- Next, you should consider all possible methods
- 18 of extraction and drilling. The fact is that what
- 19 happens in these cases -- as the Hearing Officer well
- 20 knows -- is that integration is granted and then a well
- 21 permit is submitted and the opportunity for real public
- 22 input in the well permit process is extremely limited;
- 23 and, yet, that is precisely where the rubber meet the
- 23 and, yet, that is precisely where the rubber meet the 24 road.
- 25 Rather than relying on a less open, less

1 impropriety -- not the reality -- just the appearance --

Page 36

- 2 that that decision-maker should step aside.
- 3 You asked if there was a statutory requirement
- 4 that the Administrator do this, that has not stopped the
- 5 Idaho Supreme Court from ordering disqualification of
- 6 similar cases.
- Now, I'm not re-arguing this qualification
- 8 Motion, but I am suggesting that one of the factors for
- 9 insuring the terms are just and reasonable, it is a
- 10 decision that should be made by somebody who is not
- 11 employed by any division of any property.
- Because -- no offense to you -- but the fact
- 13 is you are employed by a property owner in this State.
- 14 And in terms of setting up just and reasonable factors,
- 15 one of the things you could do is say that the remaining
- 16 proceeding will be conducted before a true neutral.
- I want to respond to something that Mr.
- 18 Christian said.
- 19 This process that we're following is not the
- 20 result of the decision in CAIA v Schultz. CAIA v
- 21 Schultz did -- in that case, the federal judge did what
- 22 federal judges do. He decided a narrow issue and
- 23 declined to decide any other issue.
- The narrow issue he decided was that, in the
- 25 absence of prior disclosure of what just and reasonable

Page 35 Page 37

- 1 public process that is not accompanied by due process,
- 2 let's discuss methods of drilling and extraction, here
- 3 and now, in this proceeding and those terms as part of
- 4 the integration order.
- 5 Another factor you must draft is preventing
- 6 the confiscatory taping and protecting property owners
- 7 from the bad business decisions of their neighbors.
- 8 The equal fiction that this is fundamentally
- 9 some kind of a democratic process is just that of
- 10 fiction. Once 55 percent of people have leased,
- 11 everybody else is stuck.
- There is no other method. There's no other
- 13 process, that I'm aware of, in the American economy
- 14 where I am stuck buying into the bad business decisions
- 15 of my next door neighbor.
- Yes, the action of a neighbor can affect
- 17 property values on the margins. If my neighbor sells
- 18 his half-million-dollar house for \$100,000, I cannot be
- 19 compelled to sell my similar house for \$100,000; and if
- 20 I were, that would be neither just nor reasonable.
- Next is, I think the Hearing Officer really
- 22 ought to address finding and appointing a neutral
- 23 decision-maker.
- Idaho law is very clear that where the
- 25 decision-maker has some interest, has the appearance of

- 1 means, it violated due process to lead to a decision in
- 2 that case. That's all he decided. He didn't decide
- 3 anything else. He didn't decide a process that was
- 4 otherwise constitutional. What he decided was the
- 5 process was unconstitutional for this reason.
- 6 Everything after that comes from your bosses,
- 7 the Oil and Gas Commission. The Oil and Gas Commission
- 8 charged you with determining in each case what were the
- 9 factors that would be considered in that case.
- 10 And when Mr. Christian objects that you should
- 11 stop doing that and just keep using the same factors in
- 12 every case, he is asking that you violate the command
- 13 given to you by your employer.
- I would suggest -- after 30 -- nearly 30 years
- 15 as an employment lawyer -- that you decline that
- 16 invitation.
- What we need here is a process where it is
- 18 possible to decide against integration.
- 19 It is possible to adjust the royalty rate
- 20 based on the individual factors that might make a
- 21 different royalty rate more just, more reasonable.
- You should be able to adjust the bonus payment
- 23 again, so that you can determine whether those factors
- 24 require something different.
- You should limit integration; and in the

Page 38

- 1 process of doing this, it's going to be necessary to
- 2 require full disclosure of all the information the
- 3 parties have.
- 4 If Snake River Oil and Gas, for instance, is
- 5 aware that there is not one pool in the Department, but
- 6 two and they don't -- or three or four -- and they don't
- 7 disclose that to objecting owners, nonconsenting owners,
- 8 then we are fundamentally engaging in dishonesty,
- 9 injustice and unreasonable if you then integrate all of10 that interest.
- The fact is the Statute here does not allow
- 12 you to do what the Statute tells you to do to determine
- 13 what is just and reasonable.
- And so it is well past time for somebody to
- 15 simply admit that you can't set just and reasonable
- 16 terms if you can't change the price.
- 17 This is an economic financial transaction,
- 18 among other things; and if you can't change the price,
- 19 you can't be just and reasonable. Thank you very much.
- 20 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr.
- 21 Piotrowski. I do have one or two questions for you, if
- 22 you don't mind.
- MR. PIOTROWSKI: Absolutely.
- 24 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: First one, just for
- 25 clarity, Snake River Oil and Gas and the Department have

- 1 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr.
- 2 Piotrowski. Those are all the questions I have at this
- 3 time.
- 4 All right. Mr. Becker.
- 5 MR. BECKER: Kahle Becker on behalf of the
- 6 Grosses and Little Buddy Farm, LLC.
- 7 I want to correct something that Mr. Christian
- 8 said. This is a State sanctioned monopoly. There's one
- 9 Applicant. There's no one else here who's applying to
- 10 integrate this property. There's no other operator in
- 11 the entire basin here who's taking the oil and gas from
- 12 underneath these people's property.
- So, this is a take-it-or-leave-it deal by one
- 14 Applicant. And we're being told to go to the
- 15 Legislature and change the law. Unfortunately, it seems
- 16 like Snake River Oil and Gas, an out-of-state company,
- 17 has a close relationship with the legislators than my
- 18 clients do, than the constituents that they represent
- 19 do.
- This impacts surface owners in the State of
- 21 Idaho who vote for their representatives. Snake River
- 22 Oil and Gas can't vote. Its Board of Directors, its
- 23 corporate headquarters aren't in Idaho. The money they
- 24 make is sent out of Idaho and we're left with the mess
- 25 to clean up afterwards.

Page 39

- 1 proposed using the same factors used in the past three
- 2 integrations; specifically, Docket No. CC-2022-OGR-
- 3 01-001, 002, and Docket No. 2021-OGR-01-02.
- 4 Do you agree with these factors; and if not,
- 5 what's your alternative proposal?
- 6 MR. PIOTROWSKI: My alternative proposal is
- 7 set out in the brief. Those factors were inappropriate
- 8 in those cases.
- **9** They are even more inappropriate in this case.
- 10 Exactly how and to what extent they're inappropriate, we
- 11 don't know because Snake River Oil and Gas is permitted,
- 12 by your agency, to not disclose what it knows about my
- 13 clients' property.
- 14 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr.
- 15 Piotrowski. One more question.
- Are the 11 property owners mentioned in your
- 17 brief members of CAIA?
- MR. PIOTROWSKI: To my knowledge, they are.
- 19 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Okay. Do you have
- 20 additional clients in this unit that are also CAIA
- 21 members?
- MR. PIOTROWSKI: I don't know that. I don't
- 23 have additional clients in this unit. I don't -- you
- 24 know, I can tell you that. I don't know whether CAIA
- 25 has additional members in this unit.

- 1 There was a promise that this was going to be
- 2 a boom for small town in Idaho in the Payette/Weiser
- 3 River area. What have they got? Submarket royalties,
- 4 the risk of having to clean up a mess whenever this
- 5 company leaves. They want something better.
- 6 My clients are not opposed to oil and gas
- 7 leasing. They're not opposed to oil and gas
- 8 integration. They want to be treated fairly with
- 9 dignity and with respect. I think that's for everyone
- 10 in this basin who's now faced with the process of being
- 11 forced to sell their oil and gas underneath their
- 12 property to one, one Applicant here.
- We're being told that this is a wildcat
- 14 operation. It's highly risky. \$9 million a month? I
- 15 don't know if anyone else in this room is making
- 16 \$9 million a month. I certainly am not. But \$9 million
- 17 a month is a good chunk of change.
- And how much of that is staying in Idaho? We
- 19 don't know. We don't know because the Applicant won't
- 20 tell us. We have a Statute that their industry wrote
- 21 that they believe doesn't allow us to even find out.
- We don't know what their corporate structure
- is, how they're using wholly-owned subsidiaries or closely-related entities to do business like a ^ shell
- 25 game and inflate the amount of their overhead so that

1 people's royalties are artificially deflated.

- 2 Not only it's 1/8th over a ^ raw number.
- 3 It's 1/8th of what? How do we even know what 1/8th is?
- 4 You're going to take garbage in and put garbage out,
- 5 that's what this process is here.
- 6 And so, yes, I understand the Department's put
- 7 between a rock and a hard place. It didn't write this
- 8 Statute. Legislators did with the behest to the oil and
- 9 gas industry. So, we're stuck with it. And I believe
- 10 it's wholly unconstitutional.
- And a factor that this Hearing Officer said
- 12 that would be considered is an administrative order
- 13 cannot violate constitution or statutory provisions.
- Well, this entire statutory scheme violates
- 15 the State constitution and the Federal constitution.
- And we've already had one court case take a
- 17 bite out of a denial of due process; and perhaps we may
- 18 need another one here to set this case back -- this type
- 19 of proceeding back on the tracks.
- The concerns in this particular situation are,
- 21 yes, right out of the gate, there's a denial of a right
- 22 to discovery.
- So, the Applicant doesn't tell us who works
- 24 for it. Doesn't tell us how much money it's making.
- 25 Doesn't tell us what its costs are. And we're just

- 1 a ton of money. And the less they leave in Idaho, the
- 2 better for their out-of-state company profits.
- So, tell us how much you're making. Show us
- 4 the records. Let us understand exactly how much money's
- 5 going out of state and how the wholly-owned subsidiaries
- 6 and related entities are being controlled and how much
- 7 they're making.
- 8 Let the citizens of Idaho know if they are
- 9 being treated reasonably because, not only does the
- 10 integration order need to be just, morally right, it
- 11 needs to be reasonable. Reasonable -- I've pointed out,
- 12 it looks to -- the reasonable rate of return, the
- 13 investment-backed expectations; Snake River Oil and Gas
- 14 has that; my clients have that; other people who might
- 15 be integrated down the road have that type of
- 16 expectation, as well; that they're treated reasonably.
- That they're not forced to sell their house
- 18 for submarket rates. That they're not forced to go
- 19 clean up a drill rig that's been left there after some
- 20 company decides to go bankrupt and forfeit its -- what
- 21 is it -- 16 or \$6,000 statutory bond. That's not
- 22 reasonable
- 30 years from now, \$16,000 is probably going
- 24 to buy a loaf of bread.
- We need to have fair and reasonable rates and

Page 43

Page 45

Hearing March 14, 2023

- 1 supposed to come in and propose fair and reasonable
- 2 factors in the dark.
- 3 Yet, the Statute has an opportunity for this
- 4 Hearing Officer to put it back on the tracks. Idaho
- 5 Code 47-320, Sub 1 requires that the integration order
- 6 proposed be on terms that are just and reasonable.
- 7 Just is what's morally right. Is it morally
- 8 right for this out-of-state company to come in here and
- 9 drill, baby, drill in people's yards?
- They get to sit and look at a view of the
- 11 hills, the farms; and now all the sudden they've got a
- 12 flare that they're looking at.
- Well, the Applicant, itself, says: Well, the
- 14 price of that is whatever royalties they pay.
- Well, again, back to Mr. Piotrowski, just
- 16 because someone else signed on to a bad deal doesn't
- 17 mean everyone else has to get a bad deal. The price
- 18 that's paid needs to reflect market realities here.
- Yes, Snake River is absolutely entitled to
- 20 make a reasonable rate of return on its investment. I
- 21 don't doubt they spent a ton of money going out there
- 22 thumping around hoping for what kind of gas is located
- 23 where; but at some point, this is no longer a wildcat
- 24 operation
- They're here to stay and they're here to make

- 1 bonds that prepare for the eventuality that mineral and
- 2 gas extraction company cleans up its mess when it's
- 3 done.
- 4 Now, I understand the Hearing Officer's hands
- 5 are tied with the Statute that's unconstitutional that
- 6 prohibits discovery.
- 7 However, the Hearing Officer is empowered to
- 8 issue subpoenas. It is empowered to issue orders to
- 9 insure that the terms are just and reasonable.
- And so, what I would propose is that in
- 11 briefing that line be set to require a list of documents
- 12 and areas of inquiry that we think need to be disclosed;
- 13 and then the Hearing Officer can decide based on that
- 14 what information it will compel the Applicant to
- 15 disclose to the objecting parties with sufficient time
- 16 that they can hire their own expert witnesses. They can
- 17 hire their own accountants to go through and propose
- 18 what is actually a just and reasonable term.
- .9 I also think that the terms of the lease right
- 20 now are proposed on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. Again,
- 21 Snake River Oil and Gas is working with the Legislature
- 22 right now to make it even a more take-it-or-leave-it
- 23 deal. And if that goes through while these proceedings
- 24 are in place, that Statute, I think, will also be
- 25 challenged because it's even more unconstitutional than

Page 46

- 1 the one we're already working with here.
- 2 But those are the factors that I think we need
- 3 to consider here; our citizens of the State of Idaho
- 4 getting a good deal. And right now, we just don't know.
- We know Snake River Oil and Gas is making a
- 6 ton of money and they're proposing four to five new
- 7 wells in this area.
- This is not a wildcat play anymore. They're
- 9 here to make money and they want to do it as cheaply as
- 10 they possibly can. It's time to put this train back on
- 11 the tracks and make sure that the citizens of Idaho are
- 12 actually making out all right as they were promised
- 13 whenever the first gas was discovered here. Thank you.
- 14 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr.
- 15 Becker. I've got a few questions for you.
- MR. BECKER: Yes.
- 17 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: First, you just
- 18 mentioned earlier in your argument \$9 million a month.
- can you tell me exactly what you're referring
- 20 to there and what your source was?
- MR. BECKER: Mr. Christian cited the
- 22 Department's website that had their production reports.
- 23 I looked at the latest one that was filed, which was
- 24 December, and it showed \$9 million.
- I think if you added up the numbers on the --

- 1 spoke to that a little bit already.
- 2 But, for clarity, can you please tell me which
- 3 of these are actual factors versus terms that you would
- **4** request at the evidentiary hearing?
- 5 MR. BECKER: I'm looking back through my brief
- 6 here.
- 7 What I'm saying is that I think the terms that
- 8 the Hearing Officer has used in the past, the eight
- 9 terms that have been cited in Mr. Christian's briefing
- 10 and in prior orders, are certainly things to consider.
- But I worry that they are being used to
- 12 arbitrarily narrow issues and that they should be viewed
- as more expansive. Specifically, just and reasonable.
- 14 That is not statutorily limited. It is a
- 15 broad and open-ended inquiry that really takes this
- 16 Hearing Officer sitting as a court of equity over a
- 17 State sanctioned monopoly.
- So, what I would propose is that things to be
- 19 considered are: Overall, are things just and
- 20 reasonable?
- 21 And the starting point of that is who's making
- 22 what and where's the money going?
- And so, you know, can that fit within these
- 24 eight factors; arguably, I would say overall, we've got
- 25 the requirement of this Statute that must be interpreted

Page 47

- 1 I believe it was the last three of 20 pages, they go
- 2 well by well. Some information is redacted. We don't
- 3 know why.
- 4 But the final report there said \$9 million,
- 5 approximately. And so, you know, it looks to be in the
- 6 \$110 million a year range.
- 7 I didn't hear any rebuttals from Mr. Christian
- 8 taking issue with that number. So, it sounds like it's
- 9 accurate. That sounds like that's the value of the gas
- 10 that they sold.
- But how that's then split out with cost of
- 12 production and overhead and other things that they take
- 13 out before they pay royalties -- and, frankly, the total
- 14 amount of royalties that stay here in the State of
- 15 Idaho, we don't know.
- I don't even know how much the Department of
- 17 Lands is getting right now under the terms of the lease
- 18 that it entered into.
- So, you know, we hope to flush all that out
- 20 and make sure the people are being treated just and
- 21 reasonable.
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr.
- 23 Becker. One more question.
- In the opening brief, you shared some items
- 25 that could be seen as factors or terms and you just

- 1 consistent with Idaho constitution and the Federal
- 2 constitution.
- 3 So, once we have information, perhaps
- 4 additional factors come to light.
- 5 But right now simply saying: Well, we got
- 6 these eight factors that we've used in the past, I don't
- 7 even know what we're here arguing about yet because I
- 8 can't get any information out of the Applicant here
- 9 other than what it voluntarily chooses to provide, which
- 10 is self-serving statements that say "in my experience,
- 11 these things aren't reasonable."
- Well, to any lawyer who's been in a court, the
- 13 reasonable -- what is reasonable in terms of relevant
- 14 discovery is things that could lead to the discovery of
- 15 relevant information at trial.
- Mr. Christian's client is saying: Oh, this
- 17 isn't relevant. You don't need to consider it.
- So, I'm saying at the outset here, let's take
- 19 a step back. Let's require some additional financial
- 20 disclosures. And then maybe we need to revisit these
- 21 terms here.
- But, off the bat is, are our citizens of Idaho
- 23 being treated justly and reasonably? That ought to be
- 24 condition number one.
- 25 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr.

1 Becker.

- 2 Are there any other uncommitted mineral
- 3 interest owners in the spacing unit that would like to
- 4 provide argument today? All right. Thank you.
- At this time, I'll invite the Department of
- 6 Lands to provide argument. Ms. Winters.
- MS. WINTERS: Thank you, Mr. Hearing Officer.
- 8 Beyond what the Department provided in its briefing
- 9 regarding just and reasonable factors, the Department
- 10 has nothing to add.
- 11 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Ms.
- 12 Winters.
- 13 I'll allow Snake River to offer your rebuttal
- 14 at this time.
- 15 MR. CHRISTIAN: Thank you, Mr. Administrator.
- Speaking first to Mr. Piotrowski's points.
- 17 The assertion that integration is guaranteed, of course,
- 18 ignores the fact that we can't even get to where we are
- 19 today without having engaged in a lengthy resume of
- 20 efforts and having achieved voluntary leases with a
- 21 significant majority of the mineral owners in the
- 22 section.
- And beyond that, we have to show, you know, as
- 24 part of our application, that we had an adequate resume
- 25 of efforts to attempt in good faith to lease those

1 integration, which is to deal with the effects of the

Page 52

- 2 adverse effects of a rule of capture.
- And, you know, the incentives in the Statute
- 4 are not to incentivize mineral interest owners to hold
- 5 out for the best deal possible by integration;
- 6 otherwise, no development would ever occur because
- 7 everyone would hold out.
- 8 There is a balancing again going on with the
- 9 correlative rights between those mineral interest owners
- 10 who have committed to development through leasing and
- 11 the operator. And, again, we don't get there until a
- 12 significant majority of people in the unit have made the
- 13 decision that they don't want to do it at all. There's
- 14 a balancing of those interests and the interest of those
- 15 uncommitted owners.
- The purpose of the proceeding is not to
- 17 maximize the return to one side or the other.
- To Mr. Piotrowski's point that you haven't
- 19 exercised the authority to adjust the lease rate in
- 20 prior proceedings is because there hasn't been any
- 21 evidence offered to you to do so.
- The evidence that's been offered has
- 23 consistently been, you know, what the market royalty
- 24 rates for leases in the area has been for some time.
- You know, we hope that we have greater success

Page 51 Page 53

- 1 uncommitted owners who are now subject to integration.
- 2 We have to show that we've complied with
- 3 fairly extensive notice requirements and all the other
- 4 requirements of the Statute for an integration
- 5 application. So, it is not accurate to say that
- 6 integration is guaranteed. There's a significant amount
- 7 of effort and clearing of bars that occurs before we
- 8 even get to this point.
- 9 With respect to the argument about the ability
- 10 to adjust royalty, I mean, this exists. Mr. Piotrowski
- 11 acknowledges the Statute says for -- you know, the
- 12 option under the Statute to elect to lease, the royalty
- 13 is set at a minimum of 1/8th.
- The objecting mineral owners are perfectly
- 15 within their rights to come to the merits hearing and
- 16 provide evidence that the royalty rate for the lease
- 17 election should be higher; for example, because they
- 18 think that the fair market royalty rate in the area is
- 19 no longer 1/8th. It's something different.
- You know, the deemed lease rate of 1/8th is
- 21 set in Statute as it is in many other states with
- 22 integration or compulsory pooling statutes.
- And, of course, you know, there's -- there's
- 24 reasons for that, that this all -- again, this all goes
- 25 back to, you know, the purposes for spacing an

- 1 and that more operators come in. And if more operators
- 2 come in, there will be greater competition and the
- 3 royalty rates and bonuses will undoubtedly rise faster
- 4 than they have.
- 5 They have risen since Snake River got here;
- 6 apparently, just not fast enough for the purposes of the
- 7 Grosses and the other uncommitted mineral interest
- 8 owners.
- 9 As to Mr. Piotrowski's point about limiting
- 10 integration, you know, the fact of the matter is if you
- 11 look at the application here, Snake River has, in fact,
- 12 identified multiple stands that it wishes to test down
- 13 to its planned -- total depth of its planned initial
- 14 well.
- So, there is already information in the
- 16 application, you know, indicating what it is that Snake
- 17 River wishes to develop and what it wishes to integrate.
- 18 To his argument about disclosure of all
- 19 possible methods of extraction, again, you know, the
- 20 operator has to submit an application for permits to
- 21 drill. There are opportunities for the public to
- 22 provide comment on those. There are extensive
- 23 regulations in IDAPA 20-0702 that the operator has to
- 24 comply with, technically, to insure that the wells are
- 25 operated safely and efficiently.

- 1 Again, if participants in the process think
- 2 that the process should be different, then they need to
- 3 take it up with the Legislature.
- 4 With respect to Mr. Piotrowski's argument
- 5 about changing the Hearing Officer, of course, that
- 6 would directly violate the Act.
- 7 As you've already noted, you're required to
- 8 make the decision in this case. Even if you hire or
- 9 appoint a Hearing Officer, they would issue a
- 10 recommended decision and you're required to make the
- 11 ultimate -- or issue the order, finally. So, a term or
- 12 condition that exceeds or violates the terms of the Act
- 13 is, by definition, unreasonable.
- Lastly, you know, to Mr. Piotrowski's point
- 15 that I have mischaracterized CAIA versus Schultz, what
- 16 Judge Winmill ordered in that case, I quoted his
- 17 language in my briefing. That's exactly what he
- 18 ordered.
- And, you know, there's -- there is the
- 20 opportunity for mineral interest owners to provide
- 21 evidence, additional evidence and there has been in
- 22 every previous integration proceeding to provide
- 23 evidence to support terms and conditions that they think
- 24 should be different from what the Applicant proposes.
- 25 That remains true in this case.

- 1 and investing in capital and competing against it and,
- 2 you know, working to develop their own gas resources and
- 3 compete for leases and do all those things.
- 4 You know, we are -- the integration proceeding
- 5 is, again, a balancing of the correlative rights of
- 6 committed mineral interest owners and uncommitted
- 7 mineral interest owners.
- 8 Because of spacing requirements that have come
- 9 about here -- as well as virtually everywhere else in
- 10 the producing world -- to deal with and mitigate the
- 11 effects of the rule of capture, it's not possible to
- 12 develop without having some system in place that allows
- 13 development to go forward if the majority of the mineral
- 14 interest owners have made the decision that it should
- 15 happen. So, we're not in a monopolist position.
- 16 I'm not going to respond to all of the things
- 17 about sub-royalty rates and cleaning up a mess and shell
- 18 games and things other than to say it's just evidence-
- 19 free. There has been no evidence supplied to you to
- 20 support any of those things. And it's unfortunate.
- Lastly, Mr. Becker said that the Grosses are
- 22 not against oil and gas development or integration.
- 23 They simply wish to be treated fairly.
- And that's precisely what the Applicant is
- 25 proposing and what the Statute, frankly, provides for.

Page 55

Page 57

- Objecting mineral interest owners will have
- 2 the opportunity to present evidence to apply the
- 3 factors; and if they choose not to do so, that's their
- 4 option.
- 5 Well, I guess to Mr. Piotrowski's argument
- 6 that our suggestion is not simply that we should just
- 7 use the same factors every single time, we haven't come
- 8 in here and suggested that to you.
- 9 We, in our application, provided you with
- 10 reasons why those factors were -- if they were
- 11 appropriate before our appropriate now.
- And we know of no different circumstances in
- 13 Section 24 that should compel you to use different
- 14 factors for consideration.
- And, again, if the objecting mineral owners
- 16 wanted to present evidence to you of circumstances in
- 17 Section 24 that would compel the use of different
- 18 factors, they were welcome to do so here today and they 19 didn't.
- Moving on to Mr. Becker's comments. I mean,
- 21 honestly, his argument sounded more like a political
- 22 stunt speech than a legal argument.
- You know, we do not -- the Applicant does not
- 24 occupy a monopoly position. There is nothing that
- 25 prevents any other operator from coming into this State

- 1 They are to receive a bonus equal to the highest bonus
- 2 paid in the unit prior to the application. So, they're
- 3 getting the best deal on the bonus side that's out there
- 4 in this unit.
- 5 They are -- you know, because, historically,
- 6 the lease rate has been set at the market level, they're
- 7 going to get a royalty rate that is equivalent to what
- 8 other landowners who are negotiating and signing leases
- 9 voluntarily are getting. That's not unfair.
- 10 Mr. Becker and Mr. Piotrowski may say that
- 11 just because somebody else agrees to a bad deal doesn't
- 12 mean we should be subject to it.
- But there's no evidence that that's a bad deal
- 14 under the circumstances in Idaho right now.
- 15 Again, you know, if the objecting mineral
- 16 owners wish to ask for and propose different royalty
- 17 rates or other terms and conditions, they are welcome to
- 18 bring evidence to the hearing to support that proposal.
- That's all I have and I'm happy to answer your
- 20 questions.
- 21 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr.
- 22 Christian. I don't have any questions for you at this
- 23 time.
- MR. CHRISTIAN: Thank you.
- 25 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: I would like to move

- 1 on to any public comments for those folks who have shown
- 2 up in person. And there's no one to provide comments, I
- 3 think, via Zoom.
- So, if there's anyone in the room that would
- 5 like to provide public comment at this time, please walk
- 6 up.
- MR. DICK ALTACAR: (Phonetic) Do I have to 7
- walk up or can I talk real loud? I'm hard of hearing. 8
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: State your name for 10 me, please.
- MR. DICK ALTACAR: Dick and Sue Altacar. 11
- 12 We're in this district.
- **HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Okay.** 13
- MR. DICK ALTACAR: How long has this oil 14
- 15 company's track record with your Department been? And
- how many years experience do you have dealing with them?
- Can you answer that for me? 17
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Certainly. That's
- 19 fine. This current operator acquired operations I think
- 20 in early 2021. We've been dealing with them since that
- time. I've been in my role for a little over
- five-and-a-half years. 22
- And so, I hope that answers your question. 23
- MR. DICK ALTACAR: I mean, if there's 24
- 25 disapproval with them, you would have record of that and

1 Winters' Department of Lands statement, number C said

Page 60

- 2 that the royalty should be similar to those in the
- 3 section or those nearby. Did I understand that
- correctly?
- Because I'd like to know the mechanism you 5
- have for acquiring that information on nearby sections
- 7 to make sure it is correct.
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: All right. Thank you 8
- 9 for that comment. We're not going to -- this isn't a
- 10 Q-and-A back and forth with the parties. So, I hope you
- 11 know that she's not going to provide an answer to that.
- 12 But that's a fine comment.
- MS. JOANNE HIGBEE: Well, if there is not --13
- 14 if the Department doesn't have a database or a mechanism
- 15 in place, it would seem appropriate that they create one
- so that if there is a higher royalty paid in a nearby
- section that you adjust offers accordingly. 17
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: I appreciate that. 18
- Thank you. 19
- Are there any other comments at this time? 20
- MS. LORI RYANS: I will. 21
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Go ahead. 22
- 23 MS. LORI RYANS: My husband and I just bought
- our property out on --24
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: And your name, 25

- 1 please?
- MS. LORI RYANS: Lori Ryans. My husband, 3 Kevin and I, just bought our property out on northwest
- 4 fourth this last July. And so it appears in the letters
- -- I have no background in understanding of how all this
- 6 oil leasing works -- but it appears from what we've
- gotten the letters that to drill they need 160-acre 8 portion of land. Is that correct? Is that why we're
- 9 all being integrated forcibly or willingly into a
- 160-acre unit? 10
- I'll go on with my comments. I might be
- 12 wrong. I might not be. Since it's not a back and
- 13 forth --
- That just seems -- I could care less about the
- 15 money and the royalties and trying to get more. It's
- this being forced into 160-acre units so that they're
- able to drill these gas wells. 17
- 18 We're right bordering the parcel that it would
- 19 happen on. And to have to look out at these gas wells,
- not knowing how close they're going to be to our
- property line, how many of them there's going to be on
- 22 that parcel next to us, it does not seem right that you
- 23 could force property owners into a situation like this
- 24 where they have no choice and you're amassing this
- 25 160-acre parcel so that the drilling that can happen,

- Page 59
- 1 you're keeping all that in record.
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Yeah. The website 3 has all the comments and stuff that's been provided.
- MR. DICK ALTACAR: Thank you. 4
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Are there any other 5
- 6 comments?
- Go ahead. 7
- MS. JOANNE HIGBEE: I'm going to stand here 8
- 9 because it's easier.
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: You can even sit, if 10
- 11 you'd like.
- MS. JOANNE HIGBEE: Okay. Thank you. 12
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Joanne, just a 13
- 14 moment. Can everybody hear Joanne when she's talking?
- 15 Okay.
- Go ahead. 16
- MS. JOANNE HIGBEE: Okay. 17
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: For the record, say 18
- 19 your name. We all kind of know you, but I want
- everybody to know you. 20
- MS. JOANNE HIGBEE: My name is Joanne Higbee. 21
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you. 22
- 23 MS. JOANNE HIGBEE: I own property in
- **24** Section 13 and 14.
- So, I guess my only comment is when I read Ms. 25

1 whether somebody wants to be a part of that or not.

- I could see if everybody was willing to pull
- 3 their property together to do this thing. That's one
- 4 thing.
- But when you have property owners who aren't 5
- 6 wanting to do that, then it just really seems unfair and
- 7 unjust to me that that would happen. And it will
- 8 negatively affect the value of our property.
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you. I can
- 10 share that for gas in Idaho, standard spacing is
- 11 160 acres or a 640-acre unit.
- There are options if the geology presents 12
- 13 itself to custom size a unit, depending on the size --
- 14 the estimated size of the pool that will be drained.
- So, if the pool, for example, covers 15
- 16 300 acres, okay, then that unit is still going to be
- square, right, or geographically it's going to have to
- be obviously over 300 acres so that it could fully cover
- all of that pool.
- 20 That's a little bit of information I can
- 21 provide. Right. I can't ask these folks to testify
- 22 back to you. But I'm happy to provide some answers to
- 23 your questions.
- So, that is also a Statute; 160 or 640. 24
- 25 MS. LORI RYANS: It seems like maybe that

1 designated, do you have the absolute right to say: No,

Hearing

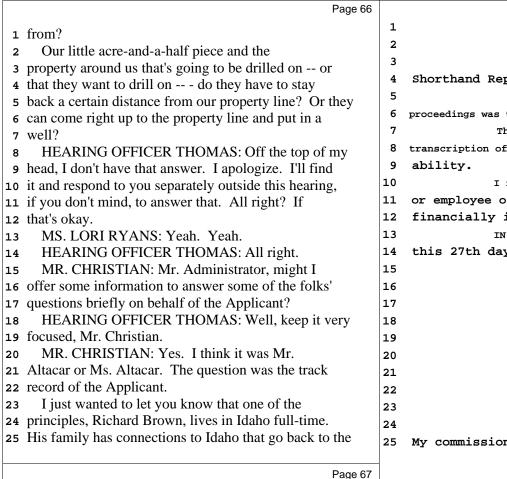
Page 64

- 2 you cannot drill on my property? Do you have -- is
- 3 there an option on that at all?
- And can that parcel, that 160 acres that we're
- 5 talking about, could it be into one corner and then you
- frack over to the area that you're dealing in? Are
- those things that are possible?
- I haven't heard anything of the possibilities 8
- of where the locations of anything would be and how it
- would affect the property owners in the area. I'm just
- 11 asking a question.
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Yeah. I can give you 12
- a little bit of information on that. 13
- To my knowledge -- and as I've been previously 14
- 15 asked -- I know what the operator's done so far. And
- there hasn't been any unagreed between a surface owner
- and the operator to drill, to put a well pad on. 17
- They have volunteered a surface use agreement 18
- with the surface owners where all of the pads are. 19
- So, there's the information I have for you 20
- 21 there.
- And in some orders that I've given, that's a 22
- requirement that there has to be a voluntary agreement 23
- between the surface use. Right? 24
- 25 We also have guidelines in Statute that set --

Page 63 Page 65

- 1 original amount, the thought would have been that
- 2 somebody -- the person wanting to enter into the lease
- 3 would have had a piece of property that large. And so,
- 4 then if they did, it's really not affecting the other
- 5 landowners around them if they have that 160 acres or
- But when they have a smaller acreage and then
- 8 you're trying to get all the other smaller acreages
- 9 around them to make up this amount, then I think it's
- kind of defeating the purpose, or whatever, of keeping
- those wells away from the property owners who have no
- interest in that who don't want to look at them, who
- don't want that noise and activity right next to them or
- 14 to see the flames. We can see a flame from where we are
- already, but... 15
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you. 16
- MS. LORI RYANS: Thank you. Appreciate the 17
- 18 time.
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Are there any other 19 comments today? 20
- MR. SCOTT: I would like to ask a question. 21
- 22 I'm Murray (Phonetic) Scott. I'm representing Mary Ann
- 23 Miller.
- The 160-acre parcels that they're drilling in,
- 25 if you are the property owner of the property that is

- 1 that put setbacks from the unit boundary to the well.
- 2 Right. So that it's ideally impossible, if not very
- 3 difficult, to get real close to that unit and then by --
- 4 you know, take any hydrocarbons from outside the unit,
- as you're referring to.
- Also, regarding fracturing; so far in Western
- Idaho, there hasn't been any hydraulic fracturing.
- And, as a geologist, I can say that that would
- 9 be highly unlikely. Because of the way the geology is
- 10 here and the formation, it's not conducive to hydraulic
- 11 fracturing. You'd basically get a wellbore full of
- 12 beach sand probably. That's a little bit of an
- 13 exaggeration. There's no real need to fracture
- 14 sandstone with the porosity that we have here in
- 15 Southwest Idaho. So, it's just not -- the geology in
- 16 this area is not conducive to it. In fact, it would
- probably be deleterious. All right.
- MR. SCOTT: Thank you. 18
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you. Any other 19
- 20 comments?
- MS. LORI RYANS: Can I ask a question? 21
- HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Okay. 22
- 23 MS. LORI RYANS: So, then you were talking
- 24 about setback. Is there a distance from one property 25 owner to the next that they must keep their wells away



1 '50s. And I believe they've owned a place in Idaho 2 since the 1970s. This is a 640-acre unit; not a 160-acre unit. 3 And it is a requirement of the Statute that 5 the drill site be leased. So, we can't drill -- have a drill location on an integrated tract. That's all. 7 HEARING OFFICER THOMAS: Thank you, Mr. Christian. 8 9 All right. It's now 10:27 on March 14, 2023 10 and this hearing is concluded. I'll take this under 11 advisement and issue a written order. Thank you, 12 everyone, for your participation today. It will be 13 within 30 days, which is April 13th. Good day. (THE HEARING CONCLUDED) 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

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_	REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE
2	
3	I, Rainey (M.) Stockton, Certified
Ŀ	Shorthand Reporter, certify:
5	That the audio recording of the
5	proceedings was transcribed by me or under my direction.
7	That the foregoing is a true and correct
3	transcription of all testimony given, to the best of my
)	ability.
)	I further certify that I am not a relative
_	or employee of any attorney or party, nor am I
2	financially interested in the action.
3	IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I set my hand and seal
Ŀ	this 27th day of March, 2023.
5	
5	ha was Borre
7 3	May "Rainey" Stocktor
)	Mary (Rainey) Stockton
)	Notary Public
	CSR No. 426
2	
3	
Ŀ	
5	My commission expires September 3, 2024

	62.7	25.16.62.0.64.10	15.0.660
ф	63:7 acreages (1)	35:16;62:8;64:10 affecting (1)	15:9;66:9 apparently (1)
\$	63:8	63:4	53:6
	acre-and-a-half (1)	Affidavit (2)	
\$100,000 (2)	66:2	7:11,16	Appearance (6) 7:21;13:22,23;14:10;35:25;
35:18,19			
\$110 (1)	acres (6)	affidavits (2)	36:1
47:6	62:11,16,18;63:5,6;64:4	5:9;21:20	appearances (1)
\$16,000 (1)	across (1)	Afterward (1)	5:18
44:23	10:16	22:6	appeared (2)
\$250 (1)	act (8)	afterwards (1)	12:1;20:25
28:5	9:22;19:5;23:19;24:2,22;	40:25	appearing (3)
\$6,000 (1)	31:15;54:6,12	again (23)	4:11;6:19;22:17
44:21	action (1)	4:21;5:12;9:4;11:12;12:22;	appears (3)
\$9 (6)	35:16	19:12,16,21;25:15;26:19;	20:19;61:4,6
41:14,16,16;46:18,24;47:4	activity (1)	29:25;32:14;37:23;43:15;	applicant (33)
	63:13	45:20;51:24;52:8,11;53:19;	5:22;7:22;8:12,18,19,20,24,
${f A}$	actual (2)	54:1;55:15;56:5;57:15	25;9:3;10:21;11:9;17:11,22;
A	19:1;48:3	against (4)	20:2;22:1;23:3;27:8;28:3,19;
-1.414 (2)	actuality (1)	29:22;37:18;56:1,22	29:25;40:9,14;41:12,19;42:23;
ability (3)	13:23	agency (1)	43:13;45:14;49:8;54:24;55:23;
30:23;32:12;51:9	actually (4)	39:12	56:24;66:17,22
able (4)	11:9;30:14;45:18;46:12	agree (1)	Applicants' (2)
18:12,24;37:22;61:17	add (1)	39:4	22:22;28:14
abnormally (1)	50:10		application (14)
28:16		agreement (2) 64:18,23	
absence (1)	added (1)	1	5:13,15;7:7,10;21:3;22:24;
36:25	46:25	agrees (1)	33:9;50:24;51:5;53:11,16,20;
absolute (1)	addition (2)	57:11	55:9;57:2
64:1	9:6;13:8	ahead (4)	applications (1)
absolutely (4)	additional (7)	13:7;59:7,16;60:22	12:21
31:5;33:19;38:23;43:19	9:12;39:20,23,25;49:4,19;	Allied (2)	apply (1)
abundance (1)	54:21	6:11;8:4	55:2
11:4	address (8)	allow (6)	applying (1)
accept (3)	3:11;5:1,4;15:15;16:24;	10:3;18:17;27:9;38:11;	40:9
22:6,6,14	21:15;32:7;35:22	41:21;50:13	appoint (1)
access (1)	addressed (1)	allowed (5)	54:9
26:12	24:14	5:8;21:19;25:19;26:3;34:16	appointed (1)
accompanied (1)	adequate (1)	allows (1)	11:6
35:1	50:24	56:12	appointing (1)
accomplish (1)	adjust (11)	ALTACAR (8)	35:22
34:2	31:25;32:13,16,17,20,24;	58:7,11,11,14,24;59:4;66:21,	appreciate (2)
	37:19,22;51:10;52:19;60:17	21	60:18;63:17
accomplishing (1)	administer (1)	alternative (2)	appropriate (6)
14:19	20:10	39:5,6	14:3;23:1;30:1;55:11,11;
accordingly (1)	administrative (5)	Although (3)	60:15
60:17	18:11;25:23;26:1;31:15;	15:25;24:2,9	approve (1)
Accountability (2)	42:12	amassing (1)	14:12
6:12;8:4	Administrator (11)	61:24	
accountants (1)	3:19;5:22;11:22;12:19;	American (1)	approximately (1) 47:5
45:17			
accurate (2)	13:16;21:2,6;22:21;36:4;50:15;	35:13	April (1)
47:9;51:5	66:15	among (1)	67:13
accusatory (2)	Administrator's (1)	38:18	arbitrarily (1)
15:19;19:16	22:25	amount (6)	48:12
achieved (1)	admit (2)	18:15;41:25;47:14;51:6;	area (7)
50:20	31:23;38:15	63:1,9	41:3;46:7;51:18;52:24;64:6,
acknowledges (1)	adverse (3)	and/or (1)	10;65:16
51:11	10:14;11:10;52:2	4:9	areas (1)
Acknowledgment (1)	advisement (1)	animus (2)	45:12
7:10	67:11	12:16;13:12	arguably (1)
acquired (1)	Advocate (1)	Ann (4)	48:24
58:19	11:2	6:11;7:17;8:8;63:22	argue (3)
acquiring (1)	advocating (1)	anymore (1)	27:15,16;29:4
60:6	27:24	46:8	argued (1)
	affect (3)	apologize (2)	25:14
acreage (1)		apologizo (z)	20.11.

			,
arguing (4)	35:7,14;43:16,17;57:11,13	53:3	called (1)
27:1,17;29:2;49:7	balancing (5)	books (1)	4:6
argument (18)	24:25;25:13;52:8,14;56:5	26:12	calls (1)
5:11;9:25;10:1;13:3;14:25;	bankrupt (1)	boom (1)	27:12
21:22;22:14,20;29:14;46:18;	44:20	41:2	campaign (1)
50:4,6;51:9;53:18;54:4;55:5,	bars (1)	bordering (1)	28:6
21,22	51:7	61:18	can (37)
arguments (12)	based (3)	bosses (1)	4:23;5:14;6:5,15;9:22;10:6;
3:24;16:21;17:9;20:5;21:23,	27:20;37:20;45:13	37:6	11:7;16:22;26:23;32:24;33:1,5;
25;22:2,4,6,12;28:24;30:11	basically (1)	both (5)	34:9,9;35:16;37:23;39:24;
around (5)	65:11	15:23;22:23;25:18;26:16;	45:13,16,16;46:10,19;48:2,23;
26:10;43:22;63:5,9;66:3	basin (3)	34:3	58:8,17;59:10,14;61:25;62:9,
arrangement (4)	26:17;40:11;41:10	bottom (1)	20;63:14;64:4,12;65:8,21;66:6
10:20;11:9;16:7;19:2	basis (2)	15:8	capital (3)
arrangements (1)	13:11;45:20	bought (2)	24:23;25:9;56:1
10:23	bat (1)	60:23;61:3	capture (2)
article (1)	49:22	boundary (1)	52:2;56:11
27:24	beach (1)	65:1	care (2)
artificially (1)	65:12	Boyle's (1)	16:4;61:14
42:1	Becker (27)	28:6	case (24)
aside (1)	5:24;6:2,2;7:19;8:1,21,22;	bread (1)	11:8;12:11;13:12;14:9;18:3;
36:2	9:2;10:5,8,9;11:18;16:22,24;	44:24	25:20,24,24;27:10;28:8;29:4,
assertion (1)	20:4;22:5;40:4,5,5;46:15,16,	Brenda (2)	11;32:19;36:21;37:2,8,9,12;
50:17	21;47:23;48:5;50:1;56:21;	6:8;8:5	39:9;42:16,18;54:8,16,25
Association (2)	57:10	Brief (19)	cases (5)
28:5,9	Becker's (1)	8:2,8,11,15,17,18,21,22,24;	14:21;24:18;34:19;36:6;39:8
assume (1)	55:20	9:2,3;11:19,24;15:14;19:11;	cause (1)
31:9	begin (2)	39:7,17;47:24;48:5	28:15
attached (2)	9:24;10:6	briefing (17)	caution (1)
27:23;28:13	behalf (7)	5:8;9:6;12:6,23;15:16,19;	11:5
attempt (1) 50:25	6:7,19;7:19;8:3;15:6;40:5; 66:17	21:19;22:24;23:11;24:14;	CC-2022-OGR- (1) 39:2
Attorney (7)	behest (1)	27:24;29:13,24;45:11;48:9; 50:8;54:17	CC-2023-OGR-01-001 (2)
6:18;18:4,5,7,9,22;20:25	42:8	briefings (1)	3:7;7:3
audio (1)	best (3)	16:16	celebration (1)
3:5	11:5;52:5;57:3	Briefly (3)	28:15
authority (5)	better (2)	11:23;15:12;66:17	certain (2)
23:14;29:1;32:17;34:11;	41:5;44:2	briefs (3)	17:22;66:5
52:19	beyond (4)	3:22;12:9;28:14	certainly (4)
availability (1)	12:1;27:5;50:8,23	bring (3)	10:25;41:16;48:10;58:18
12:4	bias (5)	4:22;29:8;57:18	Certified (1)
available (2)	12:16;13:13,14,24;20:16	broad (1)	7:12
31:21,23	big (1)	48:15	challenged (1)
average (2)	17:15	Brown (1)	45:25
17:9;18:22	bigger (1)	66:24	challenges (1)
aware (5)	28:17	Buddy (4)	29:23
17:1;22:25;23:4;35:13;38:5	bit (5)	6:3;7:20;10:10;40:6	change (4)
away (3)	18:8;48:1;62:20;64:13;65:12	burdens (1)	38:16,18;40:15;41:17
32:13;63:11;65:25	bite (1)	23:15	changed (3)
<u> </u>	42:17	business (5)	23:6;26:7;27:13
В	Board (1)	14:15;32:2;35:7,14;41:24	changing (1)
	40:22	buy (1)	54:5
baby (2)	Boise (1)	44:24	charged (1)
14:1;43:9	3:16	buying (1)	37:8
back (15)	bond (1)	35:14	cheaply (1)
4:22;23:11;42:18,19;43:4,15;	44:21		46:9
46:10;48:5;49:19;51:25;60:10;	bonding (2)	C	checks (1)
61:12;62:22;66:5,25	24:12;27:3		28:18
background (1)	bonds (1)	CAIA (8)	choice (1)
61:5	45:1	8:20;29:4;36:20,20;39:17,20,	61:24
back-up (2)	bonus (4)	24;54:15	choose (1)
3:5;4:3	37:22;57:1,1,3	call (4)	55:3
bad (6)	bonuses (1)	34:9,10,14,16	chooses (1)

Snake River Oil and Gas, LLC.			March 14, 202
49:9	commanded (1)	3:19	cost (1)
chose (1)	commanded (1) 14:12	confidence (3)	47:11
` '			
10:24	Comment (8)	11:7,12;20:1	costs (1)
Christian (24)	7:24;22:16,17;53:22;58:5;	confiscatory (1)	42:25
5:19,21,21;11:19,22;13:1;	59:25;60:9,12	35:6	counsel (1)
17:21;22:19,21;30:7,15;34:14;	comments (16)	conflict (1)	9:10
36:18;37:10;40:7;46:21;47:7;	3:22,23;7:17;15:5,10;22:15,	12:10	count (1)
50:15;57:22,24;66:15,19,20;	15;55:20;58:1,2;59:3,6;60:20;	connect (2)	33:17
67:8	61:11;63:20;65:20	18:12,24	country (1)
Christian's (6)	Commission (8)	connected (1)	26:10
13:13;17:8,25;18:7;48:9;	13:15;15:23,25;16:13;23:14,	19:8	County (1)
49:16	17;37:7,7	connecting (1)	3:17
chunk (1)	committed (3)	18:21	course (4)
41:17	25:4;52:10;56:6	connections (1)	29:18;50:17;51:23;54:5
circumstances (6)	company (6)	66:25	Court (5)
23:4;27:11;30:2;55:12,16;	40:16;41:5;43:8;44:2,20;	consider (10)	24:5;36:5;42:16;48:16;49:12
57:14	45:2	3:12;17:18;18:2,14;24:10;	cover (1)
cite (1)	company's (1)	27:6;34:17;46:3;48:10;49:17	62:18
20:8	58:15	consideration (3)	covers (1)
cited (3)	compel (4)	22:23;27:9;55:14	62:15
25:25;46:21;48:9	33:4;45:14;55:13,17	considered (6)	create (1)
citizen (1)	compelled (4)	23:23;24:18;28:7;37:9;	60:15
17:9	11:11;32:11;34:16;35:19	42:12;48:19	created (3)
Citizens (7)	compensation (1)	considering (1)	15:24;16:6;18:8
6:11;8:4;11:15;44:8;46:3,11;	27:5	15:16	creates (1)
49:22	compete (1)	consistency (1)	13:22
City (1)	56:3	30:17	crude (1)
3:9	competing (1)	consistent (3)	33:23
clarify (1)	56:1	23:18;26:17;49:1	current (1)
5:12	competition (1)	consistently (1)	58:19
clarifying (1)	53:2	52:23	custom (1)
4:17	complete (1)	consisting (1)	62:13
clarity (2)	22:14	3:15	cuts (1)
38:25;48:2	completely (2)	constituents (1)	10:16
clean (3)	11:14;12:11	40:18	
40:25;41:4;44:19	complied (1)	constitution (5)	D
cleaning (1)	51:2	42:13,15,15;49:1,2	
56:17	comply (2)	constitutional (2)	Dana (2)
cleans (1)	23:17;53:24	28:24;37:4	6:3;7:20
45:2	component (1)	continue (6)	DAPA (1)
clear (1)	4:1	3:21;7:21,23;8:2,9;16:8	25:19
35:24	compulsion (2)	continues (1)	dark (1)
clearing (1)	13:17,17	4:9	43:2
	,		
51:7	compulsory (1)	Continuing (1)	database (1)
clearly (1)	51:22	8:10	60:14
4:7	concern (2)	contracts (2)	date (2)
client (5)	10:13;11:12	32:24,25	5:7;21:18
16:3;18:3,7,9;49:16	concerned (2)	contradict (1)	dates (1)
clients (6)	24:22,25	28:2	17:22
18:1;39:20,23;40:18;41:6;	concerns (1)	controlled (1)	David (2)
44:14	42:20	44:6	6:9;8:6
clients' (1)	concluded (3)	copies (1)	day (1)
39:13	32:19;67:10,14	10:19	67:13
close (3)	condition (3)	copy (1)	days (6)
40:17;61:20;65:3	24:12;49:24;54:12	7:5	9:17,18,20;12:1;20:21;67:13
closely-related (1)	conditions (7)	corner (1)	deadline (2)
		64:5	5:12;8:11
	3.13.73.15.7/1.11.77.7.71.43.	, UT.J	J.14,0.11
41:24	3:13;23:15;24:11;27:2,13;		doal (12)
41:24 Code (5)	54:23;57:17	corporate (2)	deal (12)
41:24 Code (5) 3:14,20;21:1,10;43:5	54:23;57:17 conducive (2)	corporate (2) 40:23;41:22	17:15;40:13;43:16,17;45:23;
41:24 Code (5) 3:14,20;21:1,10;43:5 coming (1)	54:23;57:17 conducive (2) 65:10,16	corporate (2) 40:23;41:22 correctly (1)	17:15;40:13;43:16,17;45:23; 46:4;52:1,5;56:10;57:3,11,13
41:24 Code (5) 3:14,20;21:1,10;43:5 coming (1) 55:25	54:23;57:17 conducive (2) 65:10,16 conducted (2)	corporate (2) 40:23;41:22 correctly (1) 60:4	17:15;40:13;43:16,17;45:23; 46:4;52:1,5;56:10;57:3,11,13 dealing (4)
41:24 Code (5) 3:14,20;21:1,10;43:5 coming (1)	54:23;57:17 conducive (2) 65:10,16	corporate (2) 40:23;41:22 correctly (1)	17:15;40:13;43:16,17;45:23; 46:4;52:1,5;56:10;57:3,11,13

29:23	depth (2)	14	due (10)
December (2)	14:3;53:13	discovery's (1)	10:14;11:13;14:7;19:9;
28:12;46:24	Deputy (1)	25:19	25:22;26:4;31:4;35:1;37:1;
decide (8)	6:18	discuss (2)	42:17
12:20;29:1,1;36:23;37:2,3,	designated (1)	30:14;35:2	during (1)
18;45:13	64:1	discussing (1)	30:8
decided (5)	detail (1)	30:15	
21:4;36:22,24;37:2,4	12:5	dishonesty (1)	${f E}$
decides (1)	determination (2)	38:8	
44:20	11:1;21:10	disinterested (1)	earlier (1)
deciding (2)	determine (13)	20:9	46:18
11:8;20:5	5:2,10;7:14;9:7;21:13,21;	Disqualification (9)	early (1)
decision (10)	24:1,3,6,8;30:20;37:23;38:12	8:23;9:1;10:12;12:24;13:9,	58:20
21:3,9;32:15;36:10,20;37:1;	determined (1)	11;17:3,6;36:5	earning (1)
52:13;54:8,10;56:14	5:2	disqualified (1)	25:7
decision-maker (5)	determining (4)	12:18	earth (1)
14:8,11;35:23,25;36:2	3:12;8:20;23:24;37:8	Disqualify (3)	17:12
decisions (4)	develop (3)	9:8;15:15;20:6	easier (1)
14:15;19:19;35:7,14	53:17;56:2,12	distance (2)	59:9
decline (1)	development (7)	65:24;66:5	economic (1)
37:15	13:18;23:19;25:2;52:6,10;	District (2)	38:17
declined (1)	56:13,22	24:5;58:12	economy (1)
36:23	device (1)	disturbance (2)	35:13
deem (2)	4:3 DICK (6)	4:8,9	effect (1)
33:3,5	` '	divided (1) 13:22	24:9
deemed (2) 26:15;51:20	58:7,11,11,14,24;59:4 different (18)	Division (4)	effects (3)
deep (1)	12:12,13;20:12;23:5,8;25:5;	3:19;12:14;20:13;36:11	52:1,2;56:11 efficient (1)
33:23	26:19,23;33:25;37:21,24;	Docket (4)	25:12
defeating (1)	51:19;54:2,24;55:12,13,17;	3:6;7:2;39:2,3	efficiently (1)
63:10	57:16	documentation (1)	53:25
defend (1)	difficult (1)	19:1	effort (1)
15:22	65:3	documents (6)	51:7
defined (1)	digest (2)	7:1,2,5;10:19;19:4;45:11	efforts (2)
26:4	17:20;18:14	dollars (1)	50:20,25
definition (2)	dignity (1)	19:20	eight (3)
32:22;54:13	41:9	done (5)	48:8,24;49:6
deflated (1)	diligently (1)	17:14;28:22;32:3;45:3;64:15	either (3)
42:1	19:6	door (1)	16:12;31:22;32:14
delay (1)	directly (1)	35:15	elect (1)
18:8	54:6	dots (3)	51:12
delayed (1)	Directors (1)	18:22,24;19:8	elected (1)
29:9	40:22	doubt (2)	19:19
deleterious (1)	disappointed (1)	24:8;43:21	election (1)
65:17	15:18	down (2)	51:17
democratic (1)	disapproval (1)	44:15;53:12	else (9)
35:9	58:25	dozens (1)	26:7;35:11;37:3;40:9;41:15;
denial (2)	disclose (4)	17:19	43:16,17;56:9;57:11
42:17,21	34:13;38:7;39:12;45:15	draft (1)	E-mail (1)
denied (1)	disclosed (3)	35:5	8:12
24:7	33:8,9;45:12	drained (1)	employed (2)
deny (1)	disclosure (6)	62:14	36:11,13
12:23	19:12;34:3,16;36:25;38:2;	drill (15)	employer (1)
Department (28)	53:18	14:1,1;17:17;43:9,9;44:19;	37:13
6:19;7:9;8:14;12:12;13:16;	disclosures (1) 49:20	53:21;61:7,17;64:2,17;66:4;	employment (2)
15:6,13,17,21,22;16:1,12;19:2, 10;20:11,12;22:7;29:6;34:3;	disconnected (1)	67:5,5,6 drilled (1)	20:20;37:15
38:5,25;47:16;50:5,8,9;58:15;	4:10	66:3	empowered (2) 45:7,8
60:1,14	discovered (2)	drilling (6)	encourage (2)
Department's (3)	20:23;46:13	14:13;17:17;34:18;35:2;	13:17;23:19
16:15;42:6;46:22	discovery (12)	61:25;63:24	encouraging (1)
depending (2)	17:5;24:1;25:17,23;26:1;	driver's (1)	25:1
33:17;62:13	34:9,14,15;42:22;45:6;49:14,	25:24	end (1)
	2, 1 ., 10, 12.22, 10.0, 17.14,		(-)

Shake River on and Gas, ELC.		1	1,141 cm 1 1, 202
32:3	exaggeration (1)	36:8,14;37:9,11,20,23;39:1,4,7;	fine (3)
engaged (1)	65:13	43:2;46:2;47:25;48:3,24;49:4,	17:19;58:19;60:12
50:19	example (2)	6;50:9;55:3,7,10,14,18	first (7)
engagement (1)	51:17;62:15	facts (4)	5:18;21:25;22:16;38:24;
18:13	exceeds (1)	12:4;20:16,22;21:9	46:13,17;50:16
engaging (1)	54:12	fair (7)	fit (1)
38:8	excess (3)	16:14;18:1;25:7;34:11;43:1;	48:23
enough (1)	23:15;29:3,5	44:25;51:18	five (3)
53:6	executed (1)	fairly (3)	10:4;22:15;46:6
enter (2)	33:1	41:8;51:3;56:23	five-and-a-half (1)
33:5;63:2	exercised (2)	fairness (1)	58:22
entered (3)	32:21;52:19	31:5	flame (1)
10:21,23;47:18	exercising (1)	faith (1)	63:14
entire (2)	34:10	50:25	flames (1)
40:11;42:14	Exhibits (1)	family (1)	63:14
entirely (3)	7:8	66:25	flare (1)
20:13;24:4;25:5	exist (2)	far (4)	43:12
entities (3)	33:13,14	29:3,5;64:15;65:6	flurring (1)
15:24;41:24;44:6	existing (1)	Farm (3)	27:4
	23:16		
entitled (3)		6:3;10:10;40:6	flush (1)
29:18,19;43:19	exists (2)	Farms (2)	47:19
entity (2)	32:22;51:10	7:20;43:11	focused (1)
14:11;16:6	expansive (1)	fashion (1)	66:19
equal (4)	48:13	24:4	Folks (4)
3:23;26:16;35:8;57:1	expectation (1)	fast (3)	3:3;4:20;58:1;62:21
equity (1)	44:16	17:13;19:17;53:6	folks' (1)
48:16	expectations (1)	faster (1)	66:16
equivalent (1)	44:13	53:3	follow (4)
57:7	experience (6)	February (12)	16:8;21:8;31:16,17
essentially (1)	16:9,11;18:10,11;49:10;	7:16,17,19,22,24;8:1,3,10,12,	followed (2)
25:8	58:16	14,16;20:25	22:2,4
established (1)	expert (1)	federal (4)	following (2)
	45:16		
26:11		36:21,22;42:15;49:1	12:3;36:19
establishing (2)	expressly (2)	feel (1)	FOLLOWS (1)
24:17,23	21:2;24:2	19:24	3:1
estimated (1)	extensive (2)	feet (2)	force (1)
62:14	51:3;53:22	33:22;34:1	61:23
even (14)	extent (3)	felt (1)	forced (5)
13:10;29:1;33:13;39:9;	24:16;34:6;39:10	11:5	17:16;41:11;44:17,18;61:16
41:21;42:3;45:22,25;47:16;	externalities (1)	few (1)	forcibly (1)
49:7;50:18;51:8;54:8;59:10	27:20	46:15	61:9
event (1)	extract (1)	fiction (2)	forecasts (1)
21:4	17:11	35:8,10	34:7
eventuality (1)	extraction (6)	file (2)	forfeit (1)
45:1	14:13;18:10;34:18;35:2;	9:16;11:19	44:20
everybody (4)	45:2;53:19	filed (10)	formation (1)
35:11;59:14,20;62:2	extremely (2)	9:9,15,19,24;10:5,11;12:1,3;	65:10
	17:2;34:22		forth (5)
everyone (6)	17:2;34:22	15:13;46:23	` '
3:21;10:3;41:9;43:17;52:7;	TC.	filing (1)	11:2;12:23;22:23;60:10;
67:12	\mathbf{F}	9:20	61:13
everywhere (1)		filings (1)	forward (2)
56:9	faced (1)	15:17	14:22;56:13
evidence (20)	41:10	final (2)	found (3)
5:16;12:15;23:8;26:21,24;	fact (12)	16:22;47:4	22:25;23:13;29:9
27:10;28:2,21;29:8;51:16;	5:5;17:9;18:6;21:16;31:12;	finally (5)	four (3)
52:21,22;54:21,21,23;55:2,16;	34:18;36:12;38:11;50:18;	12:17;21:1,7;23:18;54:11	29:15;38:6;46:6
56:19;57:13,18	53:10,11;65:16	financial (6)	fourth (2)
evidence- (1)	factor (2)	10:20;11:8;19:2;32:1;38:17;	33:16;61:4
56:18	35:5;42:11	49:19	frack (1)
evidentiary (5)	factors (42)	find (4)	64:6
5:6,15,17;21:17;48:4	3:12;5:1,9;7:15;9:6;17:5;	14:20;32:17;41:21;66:9	fracture (1)
Exactly (4)	21:13,20;22:22;23:1,6,13,23;	finding (1)	65:13
		35:22	
39:10;44:4;46:19;54:17	24:17;27:6,8;28:7;29:7,17,25;	33.22	fracturing (3)
	ji.	I .	I .

Shake River On and Gas, LLC.			Wiaich 14, 2025
65:6,7,11	geologist (1)	hard (2)	house (3)
frames (3)	65:8	42:7:58:8	35:18,19;44:17
17:2,4;19:4	geology (3)	42.7,38.8 head (1)	housed (1)
frankly (4)	62:12;65:9,15	66:9	15:25
18:22;19:9;47:13;56:25	George (2)	headquarters (1)	housekeeping (1)
free (1)	6:9;8:6	40:23	3:25
56:19	giant (1)	hear (4)	hundreds (2)
Fruitland (2)	17:10	21:2,25;47:7;59:14	17:12;26:9
3:9,10	Given (3)	heard (5)	husband (2)
full (4)	9:22;37:13;64:22	13:5;20:5;29:16,18;64:8	60:23;61:2
19:12;34:2;38:2;65:11	goes (2)	HEARING (115)	hydraulic (2)
full-blown (1)	45:23;51:24	3:1,3,11,20,25;4:1,4;5:1,4,6,	65:7,10
29:20	Good (5)	10,17,23;6:4,13,17,21;7:13,14;	hydrocarbons (4)
full-time (1)	6:17;41:17;46:4;50:25;67:13	9:9,23;10:2,11;11:6,17;12:2,3,	14:5;17:11;33:9;65:4
66:24	government (3)	18,25;13:6,11,20;14:20,23;	т
fully (1)	19:17;20:1;25:9	15:7,12;16:10,15,18;17:1;19:7,	I
62:18	granted (1)	24;20:3,6,21,24;21:4,12,15,17,	
function (1)	34:20	21,24;23:21,24;26:24;29:7;	Idaho (39)
19:13	great (1)	30:6,21;31:14;32:14;34:10,19;	3:10,14,17,20;6:19;7:9;8:14;
fundamentally (5)	16:4	35:21;38:20,24;39:14,19;40:1;	10:15;11:15;13:19;16:1;21:1,
14:6,7,8;35:8;38:8	greater (2)	42:11;43:4;45:4,7,13;46:14,17;	10;22:7;25:3;28:5;31:14;
further (1)	52:25;53:2	47:22;48:4,8,16;49:25;50:7,11;	35:24;36:5;40:21,23,24;41:2,
23:10	Gross (3)	51:15;54:5,9;57:18,21,25;58:8,	18;43:4;44:1,8;46:3,11;47:15;
future (5)	6:3,3;7:20	9,13,18;59:2,5,10,13,18,22;	49:1,22;57:14;62:10;65:7,15;
5:6,14,16;21:17;34:8	Grosses (14)	60:8,18,22,25;62:9;63:16,19;	66:24,25;67:1
	9:9;10:9;12:9;20:22;24:19;	64:12;65:19,22;66:8,10,14,18;	Idaho's (2)
${f G}$	25:15,25;26:6,14;27:15;28:11;	67:7,10,14	10:18;18:11
-	40:6;53:7;56:21	hearings (2)	IDAPA (3)
game (1)	Gross's (4)	5:15;16:16	4:2;9:14;53:23
41:25	13:9;20:7,25;27:24	heavily (1)	idea (1)
games (1)	ground (1)	24:20	31:5
56:18	18:11	held (1)	ideally (1)
garbage (2)	grounds (2)	5:6	65:2
42:4,4	13:9;17:5	Here's (1)	identified (1)
Gary (2)	group (1)	3:25	53:12
6:10;8:7	28:10	Hey (1)	identify (5)
Gas (43)	groups (1)	18:15	4:12;5:19,24;6:5,15
3:19;5:22;12:20;13:15,18;	23:7	HIGBEE (7)	ignores (1)
15:23,25;16:10;19:3;20:11;	guaranteed (4)	59:8,12,17,21,21,23;60:13	50:18
25:2;27:21;28:9,10;30:24;32:2;	25:8;30:25;50:17;51:6	high (1)	immediately (1)
34:1,4,12;37:7,7;38:4,25;	guess (2)	28:16	19:7
39:11;40:11,16,22;41:6,7,11;	55:5;59:25	higher (3)	impact (1)
42:9;43:22;44:13;45:2,21;46:5,	guidelines (1)	27:24;51:17;60:16	11:1
13;47:9;56:2,22;61:17,19;	64:25	highest (1)	impacts (1)
62:10		57:1	40:20
gate (1)	H	highly (2)	impartial (1)
42:21		41:14;65:9	16:14
gave (2)	Hale (2)	hills (1)	impartiality (1)
17:2;28:5	6:10;8:7	43:11	14:10
gears (1)	half-million-dollar (1)	hire (4)	imply (1)
21:12	35:18	21:4;45:16,17;54:8	16:12
General (2)	Hall (1)	historically (1)	important (2)
6:19;17:4	3:9	57:5	4:11;32:10
generally (1)	halt (1)	hold (2)	impose (2)
26:17	24:3	52:4,7	23:15;27:16
generated (1)	hands (2)	honestly (1)	impossible (2)
28:19	32:16;45:4	55:21	33:21;65:2
generic (1)	happen (4)	Honor (1)	impropriety (1)
12:17	56:15;61:19,25;62:7	10:8	36:1
Centry (2)	hannens (1)	hone (4)	inannronriate (3)

Gentry (2)

62:17

6:10;8:7

geographically (1)

happens (1)

30:4;57:19;62:22

34:19

happy (3)

hope (4)

hoping (1)

43:22

47:19;52:25;58:23;60:10

inappropriate (3) 39:7,9,10

incentives (1)

52:3

Shake River On and Gas, LLC.			Water 14, 2025
incentivize (1)	25;24:6,11;25:18;26:7;27:2,5;	13:21;27:23;47:24	61:8
52:4	30:25;31:20;33:8,18,24;34:20;	13.21,27.23,17.21	landowners (2)
include (2)	35:4;37:18,25;41:8;43:5;44:10;	J	57:8;63:5
14:17;34:6	50:17;51:1,4,6,22;52:1,5;		Lands (16)
included (1)	53:10;54:22;56:4,22	James (3)	6:20;7:9;8:15;12:12;13:16;
20:20	integrations (1)	6:7;8:3,16	15:6,13;16:1;19:3,10;20:12;
inconsistent (1)	39:2	January (7)	22:7;34:3;47:17;50:6;60:1
23:16	Integrity (3)	4:25;7:7,9,11,13;12:2;20:24	language (1)
independent (1)	6:12;8:4;15:22	Jessica (2)	54:17
19:24	intend (1)	6:9;8:6	large (1)
indicate (3)	15:4		63:3
4:15;17:5;20:22	Intent (1)	JJ (1) 6:18	
	7:12	JOANNE (9)	larger (1) 13:10
indicated (3)	interest (24)		last (3)
15:13;17:6;23:3 indicates (1)	6:23;8:13;12:10,14;18:18,19,	59:8,12,13,14,17,21,21,23; 60:13	28:14;47:1;61:4
4:25	19;19:12;20:17;25:4;33:12;		Lastly (4)
indicating (2)	35:25;38:10;50:3;52:4,9,14;	job (3)	28:12,24;54:14;56:21
		13:19;14:1;20:20	
20:16;53:16 individual (1)	53:7;54:20;55:1;56:6,7,14; 63:12	Joey (2) 6:8;8:5	later (5) 5:7;20:23;21:17;23:23;30:7
37:20	interested (8)	join (1)	latest (1)
individuals (1)	10:13;14:3,18;19:14,21;25:7,	9:16 Lordon (2)	46:23
32:23	11;32:5	Jordan (2)	law (8)
industry (4)	interesting (1)	6:2;7:20	13:19;14:7;16:8;18:11;
16:10;28:9;41:20;42:9	32:25	Jr (2)	31:16,17;35:24;40:15
inflate (1)	interests (4)	6:10;8:7	laws (2)
41:25	25:5;33:4,20;52:14	Juan (2)	10:19;24:24
information (17)	interpreted (1)	6:9;8:6	lawsuit (1)
17:10;18:2;28:4;34:4,13;	48:25	Juanita (2)	29:20
38:2;45:14;47:2;49:3,8,15;	into (13)	6:8;8:5	lawyer (2)
53:15;60:6;62:20;64:13,20;	10:21,23;18:17;29:20;33:5;	Judge (3)	37:15;49:12
66:16	35:14;47:18;55:25;61:9,16,23;	29:3;36:21;54:16	lead (2)
informed (1)	63:2;64:5	judges (1)	37:1;49:14
18:6	invested (2)	36:22	lease (17)
initial (1)	24:23;25:8	July (1)	10:20,25;20:15;26:15,22;
53:13	investing (1)	61:4	32:22,22;33:24;45:19;47:17;
injustice (1)	56:1	justly (1)	50:25;51:12,16,20;52:19;57:6;
38:9	investment (1)	49:23	63:2
input (1)	43:20	T/	Leased (6)
34:22	investment-backed (1)	K	8:13;26:9;33:3,6;35:10;67:5
inquiry (2)	44:13	TZ 11 (0)	leases (11)
45:12;48:15	invitation (1)	Kahle (8)	17:18;19:1;20:11;27:25;
instance (2)	37:16	6:2;7:19;8:1,21,22;9:2;10:9;	32:20;33:3,5;50:20;52:24;56:3;
30:19;38:4	invite (3)	40:5	57:8
instead (1)	22:19;30:10;50:5	keep (3)	leasing (5)
14:14	involved (1)	37:11;65:25;66:18	12:10,13;41:7;52:10;61:6
institutional (2)	26:2	keeping (2)	least (1)
13:14,24	involvement (1)	59:1;63:10	13:22
insure (6)	20:17	Kevin (1)	leave (1)
6:25;14:3;33:18;34:11;45:9;	irrelevant (2)	61:3	44:1
53:24	25:15;28:6	kind (4)	leaves (1)
insuring (2)	Ishida (6)	35:9;43:22;59:19;63:10	41:5
		I knowing (I)	lectured (1)
11:13;36:9	6:8,8,9;8:5,5,6	knowing (1)	` '
integrate (8)	issuance (1)	61:20	30:13
integrate (8) 30:24;31:2,4,9;33:12;38:9;	issuance (1) 26:2	61:20 knowledge (3)	30:13 left (2)
integrate (8) 30:24;31:2,4,9;33:12;38:9; 40:10;53:17	issuance (1) 26:2 issue (11)	61:20 knowledge (3) 20:14;39:18;64:14	30:13 left (2) 40:24;44:19
integrate (8) 30:24;31:2,4,9;33:12;38:9; 40:10;53:17 integrated (9)	issuance (1) 26:2 issue (11) 13:13;21:6;36:22,23,24;45:8,	61:20 knowledge (3) 20:14;39:18;64:14 knows (2)	30:13 left (2) 40:24;44:19 legal (2)
integrate (8) 30:24;31:2,4,9;33:12;38:9; 40:10;53:17 integrated (9) 10:24,24;11:11;17:25;18:2;	issuance (1) 26:2 issue (11) 13:13;21:6;36:22,23,24;45:8, 8;47:8;54:9,11;67:11	61:20 knowledge (3) 20:14;39:18;64:14	30:13 left (2) 40:24;44:19 legal (2) 15:23;55:22
integrate (8) 30:24;31:2,4,9;33:12;38:9; 40:10;53:17 integrated (9) 10:24,24;11:11;17:25;18:2; 28:1;44:15;61:9;67:6	issuance (1) 26:2 issue (11) 13:13;21:6;36:22,23,24;45:8, 8;47:8;54:9,11;67:11 issued (3)	61:20 knowledge (3) 20:14;39:18;64:14 knows (2) 34:20;39:12	30:13 left (2) 40:24;44:19 legal (2) 15:23;55:22 legislators (2)
integrate (8) 30:24;31:2,4,9;33:12;38:9; 40:10;53:17 integrated (9) 10:24,24;11:11;17:25;18:2; 28:1;44:15;61:9;67:6 Integrating (1)	issuance (1) 26:2 issue (11) 13:13;21:6;36:22,23,24;45:8, 8;47:8;54:9,11;67:11 issued (3) 20:21,24;30:1	61:20 knowledge (3) 20:14;39:18;64:14 knows (2)	30:13 left (2) 40:24;44:19 legal (2) 15:23;55:22 legislators (2) 40:17;42:8
integrate (8) 30:24;31:2,4,9;33:12;38:9; 40:10;53:17 integrated (9) 10:24,24;11:11;17:25;18:2; 28:1;44:15;61:9;67:6 Integrating (1) 33:20	issuance (1) 26:2 issue (11) 13:13;21:6;36:22,23,24;45:8, 8;47:8;54:9,11;67:11 issued (3) 20:21,24;30:1 issues (6)	61:20 knowledge (3) 20:14;39:18;64:14 knows (2) 34:20;39:12	30:13 left (2) 40:24;44:19 legal (2) 15:23;55:22 legislators (2) 40:17;42:8 Legislature (5)
integrate (8) 30:24;31:2,4,9;33:12;38:9; 40:10;53:17 integrated (9) 10:24,24;11:11;17:25;18:2; 28:1;44:15;61:9;67:6 Integrating (1) 33:20 integration (41)	issuance (1) 26:2 issue (11) 13:13;21:6;36:22,23,24;45:8, 8;47:8;54:9,11;67:11 issued (3) 20:21,24;30:1 issues (6) 5:9;11:2;21:20;25:14;28:25;	61:20 knowledge (3) 20:14;39:18;64:14 knows (2) 34:20;39:12 L	30:13 left (2) 40:24;44:19 legal (2) 15:23;55:22 legislators (2) 40:17;42:8 Legislature (5) 26:8,20;40:15;45:21;54:3
integrate (8) 30:24;31:2,4,9;33:12;38:9; 40:10;53:17 integrated (9) 10:24,24;11:11;17:25;18:2; 28:1;44:15;61:9;67:6 Integrating (1) 33:20 integration (41) 3:13;5:15;7:7;10:17,22;	issuance (1) 26:2 issue (11) 13:13;21:6;36:22,23,24;45:8, 8;47:8;54:9,11;67:11 issued (3) 20:21,24;30:1 issues (6) 5:9;11:2;21:20;25:14;28:25; 48:12	61:20 knowledge (3) 20:14;39:18;64:14 knows (2) 34:20;39:12 L lack (1) 9:21	30:13 left (2) 40:24;44:19 legal (2) 15:23;55:22 legislators (2) 40:17;42:8 Legislature (5) 26:8,20;40:15;45:21;54:3 lengthy (1)
integrate (8) 30:24;31:2,4,9;33:12;38:9; 40:10;53:17 integrated (9) 10:24,24;11:11;17:25;18:2; 28:1;44:15;61:9;67:6 Integrating (1) 33:20 integration (41)	issuance (1) 26:2 issue (11) 13:13;21:6;36:22,23,24;45:8, 8;47:8;54:9,11;67:11 issued (3) 20:21,24;30:1 issues (6) 5:9;11:2;21:20;25:14;28:25;	61:20 knowledge (3) 20:14;39:18;64:14 knows (2) 34:20;39:12 L	30:13 left (2) 40:24;44:19 legal (2) 15:23;55:22 legislators (2) 40:17;42:8 Legislature (5) 26:8,20;40:15;45:21;54:3

Shahe Hiver on and Gas, Elect			
less (4)	63:12	maximal (1)	mineral (21)
34:25,25;44:1;61:14	looked (1)	27:18	6:22;8:13;18:10;20:11;23:7;
letter (1)	46:23	maximize (1)	27:19;32:5;45:1;50:2,21;51:14;
18:13	looking (2)	52:17	52:4,9;53:7;54:20;55:1,15;
letters (2)	43:12;48:5	maximizing (1)	56:6,7,13;57:15
61:4,7	looks (4)	25:11	minerals (1)
level (1)	4:21;10:22;44:12;47:5	may (9)	12:11
57:6	Lopez (2)	4:9,17;5:16;17:5;24:20;	minimum (1)
levels (1)	6:8;8:5	27:11;33:13;42:17;57:10	51:13
27:3	LORI (9)	maybe (4)	minutes (3)
license (1)	60:21,23;61:2,2;62:25;63:17;	4:20;15:5;49:20;62:25	10:4;22:13,16
25:24	65:21,23;66:13	mean (6)	mischaracterized (1)
light (1)	lost (2)	29:19;43:17;51:10;55:20;	54:15
49:4	4:21;17:8	57:12;58:24	misread (1)
likelihood (1)	lot (4)	means (4)	15:8
34:7	17:19;18:14,21;30:15	20:9;31:9;32:8;37:1	mitigate (1)
likely (2)	loud (1)	mechanism (2)	56:10
13:23;34:5	58:8	60:5,14	moment (1)
Likewise (1)	loudly (1)	meet (1)	59:14
26:14	4:7	34:23	monetary (1)
limit (2)		meeting (1)	18:19
22:15;37:25	\mathbf{M}	3:4	money (10)
limitation (1)		member (1)	32:3,6;40:23;42:24;43:21;
27:4	mailed (1)	16:13	44:1;46:6,9;48:22;61:15
limited (5)	17:23	members (3)	money's (1)
22:12;29:22;33:18;34:22;	Mailing (1)	39:17,21,25	44:4
48:14	7:12	mentioned (2)	monopolist (1)
limiting (2)	main (1)	39:16;46:18	56:15
33:7;53:9	11:24	merely (1)	monopoly (4)
line (4)	majority (3)	14:15	25:9;40:8;48:17;55:24
45:11;61:21;66:5,6	50:21;52:12;56:13	Meridian (1)	month (4)
list (1)	making (7)	3:17	41:14,16,17;46:18
45:11	41:15;42:24;44:3,7;46:5,12;	meritless (1)	morally (3)
listed (2)	48:21	12:7	43:7,7;44:10
7:5;22:24	management (1)	merits (4)	more (19)
literally (1)	10:15	23:23;26:24;29:7;51:15	13:10;27:14;28:18,19;29:12,
33:21	many (4)	mess (4)	22;30:17;37:21,21;39:9,15;
Little (11)	29:23;51:21;58:16;61:21	40:24;41:4;45:2;56:17	45:22,25;47:23;48:13;53:1,1;
6:3;7:20;10:10;30:17;40:6;	March (12)	method (1)	55:21;61:15
48:1;58:21;62:20;64:13;65:12;	3:8;8:18,19,21,22,24,25;9:2,	35:12	morning (2)
66:2	3,8,24;67:9	methods (3)	6:17;15:3
lives (1)	margins (1)	34:17;35:2;53:19	most (1)
66:24	35:17	Michael (1)	32:10
LLC (3)	Mark (2)	5:21	Motion (29)
6:3;7:20;40:6	6:10;8:7	Mick (1)	7:21,23;8:1,9,19,23;9:1,8,11,
loaf (1)	market (11)	3:18	15,16,16,17,18,19,20,22,25;
44:24	26:22,22;27:15,18,21;28:2;	microphone (1)	10:5,6,12;11:25;12:8,24;13:10;
lobbying (1)	34:8;43:18;51:18;52:23;57:6	4:8	15:15;20:21;21:8;36:8
28:4	Marketers (2)	microphones (1)	Motions (1)
located (1)	28:5,8	4:6	9:13
43:22	markets (1)	middle (1)	move (2)
location (1)	26:10	10:17	4:19;57:25
67:6	Mary (4)	might (6)	moved (1)
locations (1)	6:11;7:17;8:8;63:22	28:11;37:20;44:14;61:11,12;	19:6
64:9	massive (1)	66:15	Moving (1)
long (2)	33:23	Miller (4)	55:20
17:19;58:14	material (1)	6:11;7:18;8:8;63:23	much (8)
longer (2)	9:4	million (7)	18:1;38:19;41:18;42:24;
43:23;51:19	matter (6)	41:14,16,16;46:18,24;47:4,6	44:3,4,6;47:16
long-time (2)	13:19;20:18;24:3;31:18,19;	millions (2)	multiple (2)
18:4,6	53:10	17:12;26:10	30:1;53:12
look (5)	matters (2)	mind (2)	30.1,33.12 Murray (1)
18:16;43:10;53:11;61:19;	14:10;16:1	38:22;66:11	63:22
10.10,+3.10,33.11,01.19,	17.10,10.1	30.22,00.11	03.22
		•	•

18;17 21:5; 34:16 39:14 13;46 49:25 58:9, 60:8, 64:12 67:7 Officer 45:4 officials 19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	30:6,21;31:14;32:14; 0,19;35:21;38:20,24; 4,19;40:1;42:11;43:4;45:7, 5:14,17;47:22;48:8,16; 5:50:7,11;54:5,9;57:21,25; 13,18;59:2,5,10,13,18,22; 18,22,25;62:9;63:16,19; 2;65:19,22;66:8,14,18; 18 (1) 19 (1)	29:16;53:21 opportunity (6) 9:25;22:10;34:21;43:3; 54:20;55:2 opposed (2) 41:6,7 opposing (1) 28:25 Opposition (1) 8:25 option (7) 31:2,8,21,22;51:12;55:4;64:3 options (1) 62:12 oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
18;17 21:5; 34:16 39:14 13;46 49:25 58:9, 60:8, 64:12 67:7 Officer 45:4 officials 19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	7:1;19:7,25;20:3,6,18; 30:6,21;31:14;32:14; 0,19;35:21;38:20,24; 4,19;40:1;42:11;43:4;45:7, 6:14,17;47:22;48:8,16; 5;50:7,11;54:5,9;57:21,25; 13,18;59:2,5,10,13,18,22; 18,22,25;62:9;63:16,19; 2;65:19,22;66:8,14,18; 1's (1) 1	opportunity (6) 9:25;22:10;34:21;43:3; 54:20;55:2 opposed (2) 41:6,7 opposing (1) 28:25 Opposition (1) 8:25 option (7) 31:2,8,21,22;51:12;55:4;64:3 options (1) 62:12 oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
21:5; 34:10 39:14 13;46 49:25 58:9, 60:8, 64:12 67:7 Officer 45:4 officials 19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	30:6,21;31:14;32:14; 0,19;35:21;38:20,24; 4,19;40:1;42:11;43:4;45:7, 5:14,17;47:22;48:8,16; 5:50:7,11;54:5,9;57:21,25; 13,18;59:2,5,10,13,18,22; 18,22,25;62:9;63:16,19; 2;65:19,22;66:8,14,18; 18 (1) 19 (1)	9:25;22:10;34:21;43:3; 54:20;55:2 opposed (2) 41:6,7 opposing (1) 28:25 Opposition (1) 8:25 option (7) 31:2,8,21,22;51:12;55:4;64:3 options (1) 62:12 oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
34:10 39:14 13;46 49:25 58:9, 60:8, 64:12 67:7 Officer 45:4 officials 19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	0,19;35:21;38:20,24; 4,19;40:1;42:11;43:4;45:7, 5:14,17;47:22;48:8,16; 5:50:7,11;54:5,9;57:21,25; 13,18;59:2,5,10,13,18,22; 18,22,25;62:9;63:16,19; 2;65:19,22;66:8,14,18; b's (1) (1) cogov/administrative-hearings (1)	54:20;55:2 opposed (2) 41:6,7 opposing (1) 28:25 Opposition (1) 8:25 option (7) 31:2,8,21,22;51:12;55:4;64:3 options (1) 62:12 oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
39:14 13;46 49:25 58:9, 60:8, 64:12 67:7 Officer 45:4 official: 19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	1,19;40:1;42:11;43:4;45:7, 6:14,17;47:22;48:8,16; 5:50:7,11;54:5,9;57:21,25; 13,18;59:2,5,10,13,18,22; 18,22,25;62:9;63:16,19; 2;65:19,22;66:8,14,18; 1's (1) (1) 10gov/administrative-hearings (1)	opposed (2) 41:6,7 opposing (1) 28:25 Opposition (1) 8:25 option (7) 31:2,8,21,22;51:12;55:4;64:3 options (1) 62:12 oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
13;46 49:25 58:9, 60:8, 64:12 67:7 Officer 45:4 official: 19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	6:14,17;47:22;48:8,16; 6:5;50:7,11;54:5,9;57:21,25; 13,18;59:2,5,10,13,18,22; 18,22,25;62:9;63:16,19; 2;65:19,22;66:8,14,18; 1's (1) (1) 100gov/administrative-hearings (1)	41:6,7 opposing (1) 28:25 Opposition (1) 8:25 option (7) 31:2,8,21,22;51:12;55:4;64:3 options (1) 62:12 oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
49:25 58:9, 60:8, 64:12 67:7 Officer 45:4 official: 19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	5;50:7,11;54:5,9;57:21,25; 13,18;59:2,5,10,13,18,22; 18,22,25;62:9;63:16,19; 2;65:19,22;66:8,14,18; b's (1) s (1) cogov/administrative-hearings (1)	opposing (1) 28:25 Opposition (1) 8:25 option (7) 31:2,8,21,22;51:12;55:4;64:3 options (1) 62:12 oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
58:9, 60:8, 64:12 67:7 Officer 45:4 official: 19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	13,18;59:2,5,10,13,18,22; 18,22,25;62:9;63:16,19; 2;65:19,22;66:8,14,18; I's (1) s (1) ogov/administrative-hearings (1)	28:25 Opposition (1) 8:25 option (7) 31:2,8,21,22;51:12;55:4;64:3 options (1) 62:12 oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
60:8, 64:12 67:7 Officer 45:4 official: 19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	18,22,25;62:9;63:16,19; 2;65:19,22;66:8,14,18; 's (1) s (1) (1) logov/administrative-hearings (1)	Opposition (1) 8:25 option (7) 31:2,8,21,22;51:12;55:4;64:3 options (1) 62:12 oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
64:12 67:7 Officer 45:4 official: 19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	2;65:19,22;66:8,14,18; 's (1) s (1) (1) logov/administrative-hearings (1)	8:25 option (7) 31:2,8,21,22;51:12;55:4;64:3 options (1) 62:12 oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
67:7 Officer 45:4 official: 19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	s (1) s (1) (1) cogov/administrative-hearings (1)	option (7) 31:2,8,21,22;51:12;55:4;64:3 options (1) 62:12 oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
Officer 45:4 official: 19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	s (1) s (1) (1) cogov/administrative-hearings (1)	31:2,8,21,22;51:12;55:4;64:3 options (1) 62:12 oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
45:4 official: 19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	s (1) (1) (1) (ogov/administrative-hearings (1)	options (1) 62:12 oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
21;12:3;20:20,24; officials 19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	s (1) (1) (1) (ogov/administrative-hearings (1)	62:12 oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
19:19 OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	(1) ogov/administrative-hearings (1)	oral (5) 3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
OGCC 7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	(1) ogov/administrative-hearings (1)	3:23;9:25;10:1;21:23;29:13 orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
7:3 Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	ogov/administrative-hearings (1)	orally (3) 7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
Ogccidah 7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)	ogov/administrative-hearings (1)	7:6;20:7;21:8 order (12)
7:4 OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)		order (12)
OGCC 9:4 Oil (35)		
9:4 Oil (35)	's (1)	
Oil (35)	Į.	3:13;7:13;8:10,20;10:22;
	,	21:6;35:4;42:12;43:5;44:10;
:31:24:42:2:47:8:		54:11;67:11
		ordered (5)
	2,25;16:9;19:3;20:10;25:2;	29:3,6,6;54:16,18
		ordering (3)
	7:7,7;38:4,25;39:11;40:11,	29:10;34:12;36:5
		orders (6)
	1;46:5;56:22;58:14;61:6	23:11;30:2,3;45:8;48:10;
once (3		64:22
		original (2)
;38:7;45:15; One (32)		9:17;63:1
		others (1)
	4;28:13;30:23;31:24;36:8,	25:13
		Otherwise (3)
	2,12;42:16,18;46:1,23;	30:5;37:4;52:6
		ought (4)
	64:5;65:24;66:23	29:17;33:7;35:22;49:23
only (9)		out (30)
	9:24;21:22;25:19;29:6;	10:11;11:4,23;14:5;17:21,24;
	42:2;44:9;59:25	18:9;19:11;29:2,11;39:7;40:24;
open (1		41:21;42:4,17,21;43:21;44:5,
34:25		11;46:12;47:11,13,19;49:8;
	nded (1)	52:5,7;57:3;60:24;61:3,19
48:15		outcome (1)
Ononir	ng (8)	32:25
		outcomes (1)
8:11,	1;47:24	27:7
8:11, 19:11		out-of-state (3)
8:11, 19:11 operate		40:16;43:8;44:2
8:11, 19:11 operate 53:25	5	outright (1)
8:11, 19:11 operate 53:25 operati	ng (1)	
8:11, 19:11 operate 53:25 operati 26:12	5 (ng (1) 2	24:7
8:11, 19:11 operate 53:25 operati 26:12 operati	5 (ing (1) 2 (ion (3)	24:7 outset (1)
8:11, 19:11 operate 53:25 operati 26:12 operati 17:17	5 ing (1) 2 ion (3) 7;41:14;43:24	24:7 outset (1) 49:18
8:11, 19:11 operate 53:25 operati 26:12 operati 17:17 operati	5 sing (1) 2 sion (3) 7;41:14;43:24 sions (2)	24:7 outset (1) 49:18 outside (2)
8:11, 19:11 operate 53:25 operati 26:12 operati 17:17 operati 27:12	5 (ing (1) (2) (ion (3) (7;41:14;43:24 (ions (2) (2;58:19	24:7 outset (1) 49:18 outside (2) 65:4;66:10
8:11, 19:11 operate 53:25 operati 26:12 operati 17:17 operati 27:12 operato	5 (ing (1) 2 (ion (3) 7;41:14;43:24 (ions (2) 2;58:19 (or (7)	24:7 outset (1) 49:18 outside (2) 65:4;66:10 over (10)
8:11, 19:11 operate 53:25 operati 26:12 operati 17:17 operati 27:12 operate 40:10	5 sing (1) 2 sion (3) 7;41:14;43:24 sions (2) 2;58:19 or (7) 0;52:11;53:20,23;55:25;	24:7 outset (1) 49:18 outside (2) 65:4;66:10 over (10) 3:19;9:23;13:21;20:21;
8:11, 19:11 operate 53:25 operati 26:12 operati 17:17 operate 40:10 58:19	5 ing (1) 2 ion (3) 7;41:14;43:24 ions (2) 2;58:19 or (7) 0;52:11;53:20,23;55:25; 9;64:17	24:7 outset (1) 49:18 outside (2) 65:4;66:10 over (10) 3:19;9:23;13:21;20:21; 24:13;42:2;48:16;58:21;62:18;
8:11, 19:11 operate 53:25 operati 26:12 operati 17:17 operate 40:10 58:19 operate	ing (1) 2 ion (3) 7;41:14;43:24 ions (2) 2;58:19 or (7) 0;52:11;53:20,23;55:25; 9;64:17 ors (2)	24:7 outset (1) 49:18 outside (2) 65:4;66:10 over (10) 3:19;9:23;13:21;20:21; 24:13;42:2;48:16;58:21;62:18; 64:6
8:11, 19:11 operate 53:25 operati 26:12 operati 17:17 operate 40:10 58:19 operate 53:1,	ing (1) 2 ion (3) 7;41:14;43:24 ions (2) 2;58:19 or (7) 0;52:11;53:20,23;55:25; 9;64:17 ors (2)	24:7 outset (1) 49:18 outside (2) 65:4;66:10 over (10) 3:19;9:23;13:21;20:21; 24:13;42:2;48:16;58:21;62:18;
8:11, 19:11 operate 53:25 operati 26:12 operati 17:17 operate 40:10 58:19 operate 53:1, operate	ing (1) 2 ion (3) 7;41:14;43:24 ions (2) 2;58:19 or (7) 0;52:11;53:20,23;55:25; 9;64:17 ors (2) 1 or's (1)	24:7 outset (1) 49:18 outside (2) 65:4;66:10 over (10) 3:19;9:23;13:21;20:21; 24:13;42:2;48:16;58:21;62:18; 64:6
8:11, 19:11 operate 53:25 operati 26:12 operati 17:17 operate 40:10 58:19 operate 53:1,	ing (1) 2 ion (3) 7;41:14;43:24 ions (2) 2;58:19 or (7) 0;52:11;53:20,23;55:25; 9;64:17 ors (2) 1 or's (1)	24:7 outset (1) 49:18 outside (2) 65:4;66:10 over (10) 3:19;9:23;13:21;20:21; 24:13;42:2;48:16;58:21;62:18; 64:6 Overall (2)
	53:25 operati 26:12 operati 17:17 operati 27:12	26:12 operation (3) 17:17;41:14;43:24 operations (2) 27:12;58:19

oversee (1)	
12:10	
own (5)	
4:15;45:16,17;56:2;59:23	
owned (1)	
67:1	
owner (4)	
36:13;63:25;64:16;65:25	
owners (43)	
5:13;6:23;8:8,13;22:8;23:7;	
25:4,5;26:9,15;27:19;28:1,1	0.
17,23,25;29:12;32:5;35:6;38	
7;39:16;40:20;50:3,21;51:1,	14
52:4,9,15;53:8;54:20;55:1,1	5:
56:6,7,14;57:16;61:23;62:5;	
63:11;64:10,19	
ownership (1)	
10:14	
-	

```
P
packet (1)
  17:10
pad (1)
  64:17
pads (1)
  64:19
pages (2)
  17:19;47:1
paid (5)
  19:20;32:12;43:18;57:2;
  60:16
parcel (4)
  61:18,22,25;64:4
parcels (1)
  63:24
part (5)
  13:15;26:3;35:3;50:24;62:1
participants (1)
  54:1
participate (2)
  5:14:15:4
participating (1)
  6:24
participation (1)
  67:12
particular (6)
  11:6,11;18:3,20;19:14;42:20
particularly (1)
  25:15
parties (18)
  6:25;9:13,15,19,25;10:24;
  11:10,13;13:2;14:4;16:20;
  17:24;23:22;29:7;30:18;38:3;
  45:15;60:10
Party (9)
  8:20;10:14;14:17,18;19:14;
  20:9;22:12;26:14;27:9
pass (1)
  24:13
```

```
24:21;38:14;39:1;48:8;49:6
patience (1)
  3:4
pay (2)
  43:14;47:13
Payette (2)
  3:17;10:16
Pavette/Weiser (1)
  41:2
payment (1)
  37:22
people (9)
  17:15;18:2;19:18;20:2;33:5;
  35:10;44:14;47:20;52:12
people's (3)
  40:12;42:1;43:9
Per (2)
  8:20;23:21
percent (1)
  35:10
perfectly (1)
  51:14
performing (1)
  32:4
perhaps (3)
  10:14;42:17;49:3
period (2)
  28:16;32:3
permit (3)
  25:17;34:21,22
permits (1)
  53:20
permitted (3)
  24:2;25:20;39:11
person (8)
  4:1,11,19;11:7;12:12;22:17;
  58:2;63:2
personal (2)
  12:15;13:12
Petroleum (2)
  28:5,8
Phonetic (3)
  16:3;58:7;63:22
picture (1)
  15:8
piece (2)
  63:3;66:2
Piotrowski (24)
  6:5,7,7,14;8:3,16;13:4,7,8;
  14:24;22:3;24:20;30:10,12;
  38:21,23;39:6,15,18,22;40:2;
  43:15:51:10:57:10
Piotrowski's (6)
  50:16;52:18;53:9;54:4,14;
  55:5
place (8)
  16:4;27:1;30:14;42:7;45:24;
  56:12;60:15;67:1
placed (1)
  17:13
plan (1)
  6:23
```

planned (2)

```
53:13,13
play (1)
  46:8
please (11)
  4:5,6,14;5:19,24;6:5,15;48:2;
  58:5,10;61:1
podium (1)
  4:20
point (8)
  12:8;29:2;43:23;48:21;51:8;
  52:18;53:9;54:14
pointed (4)
  10:11;11:23;19:11;44:11
pointedly (1)
  34:15
points (4)
  11:24;17:21;26:5;50:16
political (1)
  55:21
pool (10)
  33:8,11,12,23,25;34:6;38:5;
  62:14,15,19
pooling (1)
  51:22
pools (1)
  33:8
porosity (1)
  65:14
portion (1)
  61:8
position (6)
  25:10,12;30:17;31:17;55:24;
  56:15
possession (1)
  34:4
possibilities (1)
  64:8
possible (9)
  18:25;31:19;34:17;37:18,19;
  52:5;53:19;56:11;64:7
possibly (2)
  33:10;46:10
potential (1)
  17:5
potentially (1)
  18:18
power (5)
  31:25;32:20,20,21;33:2
practice (1)
  18:12
precisely (2)
  34:23:56:24
predictions (1)
  34:7
preferred (1)
  16:10
pre-hearing (1)
  9:14
prejudice (1)
  20:17
prepare (1)
  45:1
present (5)
```

```
22:9;26:24;27:9;55:2,16
presented (1)
  28:2
presents (1)
  62:12
presiding (3)
  3:19;9:23;20:18
pretty (1)
  24:19
prevailing (1)
  26:16
prevent (1)
  23:20
preventing (2)
  25:1;35:5
prevents (1)
  55:25
previous (4)
  23:1,5,11;54:22
previously (2)
  23:13;64:14
price (4)
  38:16,18;43:14,17
prices (1)
  28:16
principles (1)
  66:24
print (1)
  17:19
prior (6)
  20:17;32:19;36:25;48:10;
  52:20:57:2
private (2)
  32:24.25
probably (3)
  44:23;65:12,17
Procedures (1)
  31:15
proceed (1)
  21:23
PROCEEDED (1)
  3:1
proceeding (12)
  23:22;25:16,23;26:2;29:20;
  34:11;35:3;36:16;42:19;52:16;
  54:22;56:4
proceedings (4)
  23:2;25:18;45:23;52:20
process (35)
  11:13,14,15;14:6,7;25:22;
  26:4,11;29:5,9,13;30:18,25;
  31:4,11,12,12,13;32:9;34:22;
  35:1,1,9,13;36:19;37:1,3,5,17;
  38:1;41:10;42:5,17;54:1,2
processes (1)
  29:22
produced (1)
  27:21
producing (1)
  56:10
production (4)
```

5:14;9:18

passed (2)

past (5)

25:12;28:12;46:22;47:12

professionalism (1)

		1	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
16:17	pull (1)	48:15;62:6;63:4	regulated (3)
profits (1)	62:2	re-arguing (1)	24:19,24;25:5
44:2	purpose (6)	36:7	regulations (2)
program (1)	5:4;21:15;23:22;30:19;	reason (2)	24:24;53:23
12:20	52:16;63:10	16:11;37:5	regulatory (2)
prohibition (2)	purposes (4)	reasonable (54)	18:19;19:13
27:3,4	23:19;25:16;51:25;53:6	3:14;5:2,3,5,10;7:14;9:7;	related (3)
prohibits (1)	pursuant (3)	10:2;13:25;15:14;21:14,16,21;	9:12;10:19;44:6
45:6	3:20;10:18;21:10	23:24;30:15,16,22;31:1,6,8,10,	relates (2)
promise (1)	put (9)	12,24;32:9,10,15;33:10,21;	9:22;31:18
41:1	11:2;18:23;42:4,6;43:4;		
		34:12;35:20;36:9,14,25;37:21;	relationship (1)
promised (1)	46:10;64:17;65:1;66:6	38:13,15,19;43:1,6,20;44:11,	40:17
46:12	puts (1)	11,12,22,25;45:9,18;47:21;	relative (1)
promptly (1)	11:9	48:13,20;49:11,13,13;50:9	27:12
12:3		reasonably (4)	relevant (6)
property (28)	Q	18:25;44:9,16;49:23	24:21;25:25;34:5;49:13,15,
27:12;35:6,17;36:11,13;		reasoning (1)	17
39:13,16;40:10,12;41:12;	Q-and-A (1)	30:3	relief (1)
59:23;60:24;61:3,21,23;62:3,5,	60:10	reasons (4)	9:15
8;63:3,11,25,25;64:2,10;65:24;	qualification (1)	12:22;21:9;51:24;55:10	relies (1)
66:3,5,6	36:7	rebuttal (5)	12:4
proposal (3)	quick (1)	16:22;22:11;30:5,8;50:13	rely (1)
39:5,6;57:18	18:25	rebuttals (1)	24:19
propose (6)	quoted (1)	47:7	relying (1)
23:23;43:1;45:10,17;48:18;	54:16	Receipts (1)	34:25
57:16		7:12	remain (1)
proposed (9)	R	receive (4)	16:2
6:23;10:17;22:22;27:8,12;		9:12;28:17,18;57:1	remaining (1)
29:25;39:1;43:6;45:20	raise (1)	received (1)	36:15
proposes (1)	28:25	9:8	remains (1)
54:24	Range (2)	receives (1)	54:25
	0 , ,	17:10	reminded (1)
proposing (2)	3:16;47:6		
46:6;56:25	rapid (1)	receiving (2)	4:8
prospect (1)	13:18	9:17;29:12	reminder (1)
17:16	rate (23)	recognized (1)	15:3
protect (1)	24:11,18,23;25:8;26:16,18;	25:18	repeat (1)
23:20	27:18;32:1,8,17,18,20;34:8;	recommended (1)	29:24
protecting (1)	37:19,21;43:20;44:12;51:16,	54:10	repeatedly (3)
35:6	18,20;52:19;57:6,7	record (11)	27:16;28:25;34:15
protections (1)	rates (13)	4:13;5:20;7:1,2,6;15:18;	repeating (1)
27:19	26:15,22;27:17,25;28:1;	58:15,25;59:1,18;66:22	23:10
provide (18)	32:13,16;44:18,25;52:24;53:3;	recorded (1)	replaced (1)
11:20;16:21;19:25;22:20;	56:17;57:17	4:2	12:18
27:18;30:10;49:9;50:4,6;51:16;	Rather (1)	recorder (1)	replacement (1)
53:22;54:20,22;58:2,5;60:11;	34:25	3:5	18:5
62:21,22	raw (1)	recording (4)	Reply (3)
provided (6)	42:2	3:4,6;4:3,4	8:2:9:2,3
3:14;9:10;12:15;50:8;55:9;	read (1)	Records (6)	report (3)
59:3	59:25	10:19;11:4;19:5,23;26:13;	28:13,21;47:4
provides (4)	reading (1)	44:4	reports (1)
12:19;21:2;27:6;56:25	15:16	recovery (1)	46:22
providing (2)	real (4)	34:7	represent (5)
18:1;26:12		redacted (1)	5:20,25;6:6,16;40:18
	34:21;58:8;65:3,13		
provision (1)	realities (1)	47:2	representative (2)
17:4	43:18	refer (1)	4:14;28:6
provisions (3)	reality (1)	24:4	representatives (1)
23:16;27:18;42:13	36:1	referring (2)	40:21
Public (15)	realize (2)	46:19;65:5	represented (1)
10:18;11:4,7,12;19:5,23;	18:18;31:13	reflect (1)	18:7
22:15,16;24:19;32:4;34:21;	realizing (1)	43:18	representing (3)
35:1;53:21;58:1,5	18:15	regarding (6)	4:16;6:2;63:22
Publication (2)	really (7)	17:4;24:18;27:14,23;50:9;	represents (2)
7:11,16	11:23;28:14;33:7;35:21;	65:6	14:8;28:10
	, ,,		,

Shake River on the out, Elec			171uren 11, 202
Request (7)	23:20;25:1,13;51:15;52:9;	65:12	30:21;31:23;32:15;33:21;
10:19;11:4;12:23;19:5,23;	56:5	sandstone (1)	38:15;39:7;42:18;45:11;51:13,
20:19;48:4	rise (1)	65:14	21;57:6;64:25
requested (1)	53:3	Sarah (3)	setback (1)
10:18	risen (1)	6:8;7:24;8:5	65:24
require (5)	53:5	sat (1)	setbacks (1)
34:2;37:24;38:2;45:11;49:19	risk (1)	17:11	65:1
required (8)	41:4	saying (4)	sets (2)
4:2;16:4;26:1;31:9,15,17;	risky (1)	48:7;49:5,16,18	31:16;33:2
54:7,10	41:14	scene (1)	setting (3)
requirement (5)	River (26)	12:2	24:18;32:9;36:14
25:22;36:3;48:25;64:23;67:4	5:22;10:16;19:3;22:1,10;	scheduled (1) 26:25	seven (2)
requirements (3) 51:3,4;56:8	26:23;27:16;28:22;30:24;32:2; 34:4,12;38:4,25;39:11;40:16,	scheme (2)	9:16,18 Several (2)
requires (2)	21;41:3;43:19;44:13;45:21;	26:2;42:14	25:14;29:13
18:21;43:5	46:5;50:13;53:5,11,17	Schultz (4)	severance (1)
reserve (1)	River's (1)	29:4;36:20,21;54:15	28:18
30:7	9:10	scope (5)	shall (1)
resource (1)	road (2)	3:12;5:1,9;21:13,20	21:2
10:15	34:24;44:15	SCOTT (3)	share (1)
resources (3)	rock (1)	63:21,22;65:18	62:10
13:18;25:2;56:2	42:7	screens (1)	shared (1)
respect (5)	role (1)	16:5	47:24
16:17;19:9;41:9;51:9;54:4	58:21	script (1)	shell (2)
respond (4)	room (2)	15:8	41:24;56:17
5:13;36:17;56:16;66:10	41:15;58:4	searched (1)	short (2)
responding (2)	rounds (1)	18:9	18:15;28:16
9:19,21	29:13	Secondly (1)	show (4)
Response (7)	royalties (6)	28:4	28:11;44:3;50:23;51:2
7:22;8:13,22,24;9:11;11:3,19	41:3;42:1;43:14;47:13,14;	Section (12)	showed (1)
responses (1) 9:13	61:15 royalty (25)	3:16;10:2;23:4,8;26:17;	46:24
responsible (1)	24:11;25:4;26:22;27:19,25;	27:11;50:22;55:13,17;59:24; 60:3,17	shown (1) 58:1
12:13	28:1,17;32:1,8,13,17,17,20;	sections (1)	side (2)
restrictions (1)	37:19,21;51:10,12,16,18;52:23;	60:6	52:17;57:3
23:15	53:3;57:7,16;60:2,16	seeking (2)	sign (1)
result (3)	rubber (1)	9:15;19:22	18:12
14:6;28:17;36:20	34:23	seem (4)	signed (1)
resume (2)	rule (2)	27:15,17;60:15;61:22	43:16
50:19,24	52:2;56:11	seems (4)	significant (3)
return (5)	rules (3)	40:15;61:14;62:6,25	50:21;51:6;52:12
24:23;25:8;43:20;44:12;	18:17;23:17;25:19	selection (1)	signing (1)
52:17	ruling (1)	28:7	57:8
revenue (1)	21:7	self-serving (1)	similar (6)
28:19	Ryan (2)	49:10	9:15,16;30:2;35:19;36:6;
reviewed (1)	6:10;8:7	sell (3)	60:2
3:22	RYANS (9)	35:19;41:11;44:17	simply (7)
revisit (1) 49:20	60:21,23;61:2,2;62:25;63:17; 65:21,23;66:13	sells (1) 35:17	11:12;19:13;20:2;38:15; 49:5;55:6;56:23
49.20 Richard (1)	03.21,23,00.13	sent (1)	49.5,53.0,50.25 single (3)
66:24	S	40:24	27:4;28:21;55:7
rig (2)	В	sentence (1)	sit (3)
17:17;44:19	safely (1)	32:3	13:20;43:10;59:10
rigged (2)	53:25	separate (3)	site (1)
31:11,13	sale (1)	15:23;16:2;33:13	67:5
right (36)	32:11	separately (1)	sitting (1)
4:20;6:24;14:3;16:21;17:14;	same (3)	66:10	48:16
21:11;30:7;32:5;40:4;42:21,21;	37:11;39:1;55:7	seriously (1)	situation (7)
43:7,8;44:10;45:19,22;46:4,12;	Sanchez (4)	16:7	11:6,10;17:21;19:15,25;
47:17;49:5;50:4;57:14;60:8;	6:9,10;8:6,7	service (1)	42:20;61:23
61:18,22;62:17,21;63:13;64:1,	sanctioned (3)	32:4	size (4)
24;65:2,17;66:6,11,14;67:9	25:9;40:8;48:17	set (17)	33:15;62:13,13,14
rights (6)	sand (1)	3:11;12:22;22:23;26:15,18;	small (2)
-	1		

Snake River Oil and Gas, LLC.			March 14, 2023
33:25;41:2	starting (2)	submit (1)	33:11;59:14;64:5;65:23
smaller (2)	14:21;48:21	53:20	taping (1)
63:7,8	State (24)	submittal (2)	35:6
Snake (25)	10:13,15,21;11:15;12:11,13;	5:8;21:19	tax (1)
5:22;9:10;19:3;22:1,10;	16:13;18:18;20:12;21:22;25:2;	submitted (3)	19:20
26:23;27:16;28:22;30:24;32:2;	27:25;28:18;29:21;36:13;40:8,	5:16;12:9;34:21	taxes (1)
34:3,12;38:4,25;39:11;40:16,	20;42:15;44:5;46:3;47:14;	subpoenas (2)	28:19
21;43:19;44:13;45:21;46:5;	48:17;55:25;58:9	26:3;45:8	technically (1)
50:13;53:5,11,16	statement (2)	sub-royalty (1)	53:24
sold (2)	15:18;60:1	56:17	tells (1)
32:11;47:10	statements (1)	subsidiaries (2)	38:12
somebody (5)	49:10	41:23;44:5	tenor (1)
36:10;38:14;57:11;62:1;63:2	states (3)	substance (2)	24:14
someone (3)	26:18;29:22;51:21	12:8;24:16	term (3)
4:22;17:20;43:16	State's (1)	substantial (2)	33:11;45:18;54:11
sort (1)	10:25	13:10;20:17	terms (43)
10:20	stating (2)	success (1)	3:13;5:2,5;9:7;13:21;17:18,
sound (1)	4:12;21:9	52:25	25;20:15;21:16;23:24;24:10;
30:3	station (1)	sudden (4)	27:2,13;30:21;31:1,6,8,10,24;
sounded (1)	28:10	17:13,16;18:6;43:11	32:9,11;33:2,21,24,24,25;35:3;
55:21	Statute (26)	Sue (1)	36:9,14;38:16;43:6;45:9,19;
sounds (2)	12:19;15:24;17:1,3;25:17,20;	58:11	47:17,25;48:3,7,9;49:13,21;
47:8,9	26:18;27:5;31:16;38:11,12;	sufficient (1)	54:12,23;57:17
source (1)	41:20;42:8;43:3;45:5,24;48:25;	45:15	test (1)
46:20	51:4,11,12,21;52:3;56:25;	suggest (2)	53:12
Southwest (1)	62:24;64:25;67:4	31:22;37:14	testify (1)
65:15	statutes (2)	suggested (2)	62:21
spacing (5)	18:17;51:22	26:23;55:8	testimony (1)
3:15;50:3;51:25;56:8;62:10	statutorily (3)	suggesting (1)	11:20
speak (5)	14:12;21:5;48:14	36:8	Third (2)
4:6,13,18;10:3;30:5	statutory (8)	suggestion (2)	33:7,16
speaking (2)	13:17;14:4;16:6;23:16;36:3;	32:7;55:6	third-party (1)
4:22;50:16	42:13,14;44:21	supervise (1)	14:14 THOMAS (54)
specific (3) 24:10,12;27:2	stay (3)	20:10	THOMAS (54)
	43:25;47:14;66:4	supervisor (1) 12:13	3:3,18;5:23;6:4,13,21;11:17; 12:25;13:4,6;14:23;15:2,7;
specifically (5) 12:19;20:15;29:9;39:2;48:13	staying (1) 41:18	supplied (1)	12.23,13.4,0,14.23,13.2,7, 16:4,9,18;20:3;30:6,12;38:20,
specify (1)	step (2)	56:19	24;39:14,19;40:1;46:14,17;
29:7	36:2;49:19	Support (4)	47:22;49:25;50:11;57:21,25;
speech (1)	still (6)	8:9;54:23;56:20;57:18	58:9,13,18;59:2,5,10,13,18,22;
55:22	5:14;11:3;19:1,3;21:5;62:16	supposed (1)	60:8,18,22,25;62:9;63:16,19;
spend (1)	stop (1)	43:1	64:12;65:19,22;66:8,14,18;
23:10	37:11	Supreme (1)	67:7
spent (2)	stopped (1)	36:5	thought (1)
30:15;43:21	36:4	sure (4)	63:1
spinning (1)	story (1)	16:3;46:11;47:20;60:7	thousands (1)
31:3	31:12	surface (7)	17:12
split (1)	structure (1)	24:12;27:3;40:20;64:16,18,	three (5)
47:11	41:22	19,24	23:1;29:15;38:6;39:1;47:1
spoke (1)	stuck (3)	suspension (1)	Thumb (1)
48:1	35:11,14;42:9	25:24	16:3
square (1)	stuff (1)	Switching (1)	thumping (1)
62:17	59:3	21:12	43:22
stand (3)	stunt (1)	system (2)	tied (2)
5:25;30:4;59:8	55:22	14:17;56:12	32:16;45:5
standard (1)	Sub (5)	Т	tight (1)
62:10	3:15;21:1,1,10;43:5	T	17:2
stands (1)	subject (4)	taka it an laama it (2)	timeliness (1)
53:12 storing (1)	23:11;24:13;51:1;57:12	take-it-or-leave-it (3)	16:25 titles (1)
staring (1) 17:16	subjects (1) 27:10	40:13;45:20,22 talk (1)	20:20
start (1)	submarket (3)	58:8	today (9)
30:23	27:17;41:3;44:18	talking (4)	6:24;9:7;30:20;33:19;50:4,
	2.11,110,1110		5.2 .,,55.25,55.17,55.1,

Shake Miter on and Gas, Eller		T.	17141 611 11, 2020
19;55:18;63:20;67:12	11:24;31:25;32:23;38:6,21	upon (1)	27:16;62:1
today's (1)	type (3)	24:20	warranted (1)
3:4	10:22;42:18;44:15	use (7)	31:20
together (2)	types (1)	24:12;27:4;55:7,13,17;64:18,	waste (2)
18:23;62:3	29:8	24.12,27.4,33.7,13,17,04.10,	23:20;25:1
told (4)	29.8	used (9)	waterway (1)
17:24;34:15;40:14;41:13	U	5:9;9:7;21:13,20;23:6;39:1;	18:16
	U		
ton (3)	10. (4.)	48:8,11;49:6	waterways (1)
43:21;44:1;46:6	ultimate (1)	using (4)	20:8
tone (1)	54:11	3:5;37:11;39:1;41:23	way (5)
15:19	unagreed (1)	utilities (3)	23:9;26:16;28:20;29:21;65:9
top (1)	64:16	24:19,24;25:6	Weatherspoon (3)
66:8	uncommitted (9)	T 7	6:9;7:25;8:6
topic (1)	5:13;6:22;22:8;27:19;50:2;	\mathbf{V}	website (4)
21:13	51:1;52:15;53:7;56:6		7:3;9:5;46:22;59:2
total (2)	unconstitutional (4)	Vacating (1)	weight (1)
47:13;53:13	37:5;42:10;45:5,25	7:13	3:23
totally (1)	Under (11)	value (5)	welcome (4)
33:13	9:14;12:12;17:11,25;19:4;	27:20,22;33:15;47:9;62:8	10:7;11:21;55:18;57:17
toward (1)	30:2;31:14;47:17;51:12;57:14;	values (1)	wellbore (1)
28:22	67:10	35:17	65:11
town (1)	underneath (3)	vastly (1)	wells (6)
41:2	18:10;40:12;41:11	33:25	46:7;53:24;61:17,19;63:11;
Township (1)	understands (1)	Vega (3)	65:25
3:16	14:15	14:25;15:2,7	West (1)
track (3)	undoubtedly (1)	versus (3)	3:16
17:13;58:15;66:21	53:3	29:4;48:3;54:15	Western (1)
tracks (3)	unfair (4)	via (3)	65:6
42:19;43:4;46:11	14:7;28:22;57:9;62:6	4:1;12:2;58:3	what's (7)
tract (1)	unfettered (1)	video (1)	17:8;30:14,16;32:11,12;39:5;
67:6	26:12	4:21	
			43:7
trade (1)	unfortunate (3)	Vidlak (2)	wheels (1)
28:9	15:21;16:14;56:20	6:10;8:7	31:3
train (1)	Unfortunately (1)	view (3)	whenever (2)
46:10	40:15	11:25;28:14;43:10	41:4;46:13
transaction (3)	unit (23)	viewed (1)	where's (1)
32:1,23;38:17	3:15;6:23;10:17;11:11;	48:12	48:22
transparency (2)	18:16,20;20:9;39:20,23,25;	violate (3)	wholly (1)
19:22,22	50:3;52:12;57:2,4;61:10;62:11,	37:12;42:13;54:6	42:10
transparent (2)	13,16;65:1,3,4;67:3,3	violated (1)	wholly-owned (2)
11:14;19:18	units (1)	37:1	41:23;44:5
traverses (1)	61:16	violates (6)	who's (7)
18:16	unjust (1)	14:7;31:4,4,5;42:14;54:12	11:8;14:11;40:9,11;41:10;
treated (6)	62:7	virtual (1)	48:21;49:12
41:8;44:9,16;47:20;49:23;	unknown (1)	4:1	wildcat (3)
56:23	33:20	virtually (1)	41:13;43:23;46:8
tremendous (1)	unlikely (1)	56:9	willing (1)
13:22	65:9	voluntarily (4)	62:2
trial (1)	unreasonable (2)	10:25;26:9;49:9;57:9	willingly (1)
49:15	38:9;54:13	voluntary (2)	61:9
true (3)	unspecified (1)	50:20;64:23	Winmill (2)
26:4;36:16;54:25	24:4	volunteered (1)	29:3;54:16
Trust (1)	untimely (2)	64:18	Winters (11)
10:15	11:25;20:19	vote (4)	6:15,17,18;15:5,10,12;16:19;
trying (3)	up (22)	13:13;16:15;40:21,22	24:14;50:6,7,12
19:16;61:15;63:8		13.13,10.13,40.21,22	Winters' (1)
	4:19;5:25;10:3,7;21:8;26:8,	\mathbf{W}	
Tuesday (1)	20;29:15;31:16;36:14;40:25;	vv	60:1
3:8	41:4;44:19;45:2;46:25;54:3;		wish (4)
turn (3)	56:17;58:2,6,8;63:9;66:6	waiting (2)	13:21;30:16;56:23;57:16
4:7;21:12;29:19	upcoming (1)	11:3;19:1	wishes (3)
turned (1)	16:16	walk (3)	53:12,17,17
29:11	upheld (1)	10:7;58:5,8	within (8)
two (5)	29:22	wants (2)	9:16;12:12;16:1;18:5;23:14;
		1	

Shake Kivel Oli aliu Gas, LLC.	T	T	
48:23;51:15;67:13	67:9	67:13	
without (5)	10B (1)	300 (2)	
18:1;26:11,11;50:19;56:12	33:11	62:16,18	
Witnesses (2)	10D (1)	31 (1)	
5:16;45:16	33:12	4:25	
words (1)	10th (1)	31st (3)	
29:15	8:25	7:13;12:2;20:24	
	11 (1)	7.13,12.2,20.24	
working (5)	39:16	4	
20:1;25:4;45:21;46:1;56:2		4	
works (5)	13 (1)	47, 220, (2)	
14:18;19:17;28:20;42:23;	59:24	47-320 (2)	
61:6	13th (3)	3:15;43:5	
world (1)	9:2,3;67:13	47-328 (2)	
56:10	14 (6)	3:20;21:1	
worry (1)	3:8;9:20;12:1;20:21;59:24;	-	
48:11	67:9	5	
write (2)	16 (1)	- (a)	
32:14;42:7	44:21	5 (1)	
written (6)	160 (4)	3:16	
3:23;9:10;15:20;16:8;21:8;	62:11,24;63:5;64:4	5,000 (1)	
67:11	160-acre (6)	34:1	
wrong (3)	61:7,10,16,25;63:24;67:3	50,000 (1)	
13:13;14:8;61:12	17 (3)	33:22	
wrote (1)	7:19,22;20:25	50s (1)	
41:20	1970s (1)	67:1	
•	67:2	55 (1)	
${f Y}$	1st (4)	35:10	
	7:16;8:18,19,21	_	
yards (1)	_	6	
43:9	2		
year (1)		6 (1)	
47:6	20 (1)	8:22	
47:6 years (7)	20 (1) 47:1		
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23;		8:22	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22	47:1	8:22 640 (2)	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23;	47:1 20-0702 (2)	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1)	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1)	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1)	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1)	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1)	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1)	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2)	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7)	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2)	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1)	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3)	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1)	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24)	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1)	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1)	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24)	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1) 39:3	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24) 7:7,9,11,16,17,19,22,24;8:1,	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1) 39:3 04.11.01.651 (1)	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24) 7:7,9,11,16,17,19,22,24;8:1, 3,10,12,14,16,18,19,21,22,24,	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1) 39:3 04.11.01.651 (1) 4:3	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24) 7:7,9,11,16,17,19,22,24;8:1, 3,10,12,14,16,18,19,21,22,24, 25;9:2,3,8;20:25	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1) 39:3 04.11.01.651 (1) 4:3 04.11.01-565 (1) 9:14	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24) 7:7,9,11,16,17,19,22,24;8:1, 3,10,12,14,16,18,19,21,22,24, 25;9:2,3,8;20:25 24 (8) 3:16;8:12;23:4,8;26:17; 27:11;55:13,17	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24 9	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1) 39:3 04.11.01.651 (1) 4:3 04.11.01-565 (1)	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24) 7:7,9,11,16,17,19,22,24;8:1, 3,10,12,14,16,18,19,21,22,24, 25;9:2,3,8;20:25 24 (8) 3:16;8:12;23:4,8;26:17; 27:11;55:13,17 28 (2)	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24 9	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1) 39:3 04.11.01.651 (1) 4:3 04.11.01-565 (1) 9:14	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24) 7:7,9,11,16,17,19,22,24;8:1, 3,10,12,14,16,18,19,21,22,24, 25;9:2,3,8;20:25 24 (8) 3:16;8:12;23:4,8;26:17; 27:11;55:13,17	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24 9	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1) 39:3 04.11.01.651 (1) 4:3 04.11.01-565 (1) 9:14	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24) 7:7,9,11,16,17,19,22,24;8:1, 3,10,12,14,16,18,19,21,22,24, 25;9:2,3,8;20:25 24 (8) 3:16;8:12;23:4,8;26:17; 27:11;55:13,17 28 (2) 8:14,16	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24 9	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1) 39:3 04.11.01.651 (1) 4:3 04.11.01-565 (1) 9:14	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24) 7:7,9,11,16,17,19,22,24;8:1, 3,10,12,14,16,18,19,21,22,24, 25;9:2,3,8;20:25 24 (8) 3:16;8:12;23:4,8;26:17; 27:11;55:13,17 28 (2)	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24 9	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1) 39:3 04.11.01.651 (1) 4:3 04.11.01-565 (1) 9:14 1 1 (2)	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24) 7:7,9,11,16,17,19,22,24;8:1, 3,10,12,14,16,18,19,21,22,24, 25;9:2,3,8;20:25 24 (8) 3:16;8:12;23:4,8;26:17; 27:11;55:13,17 28 (2) 8:14,16	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24 9	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1) 39:3 04.11.01.651 (1) 4:3 04.11.01-565 (1) 9:14 1 1 (2) 3:15;43:5 1/8th (6)	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24) 7:7,9,11,16,17,19,22,24;8:1, 3,10,12,14,16,18,19,21,22,24, 25;9:2,3,8;20:25 24 (8) 3:16;8:12;23:4,8;26:17; 27:11;55:13,17 28 (2) 8:14,16	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24 9	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1) 39:3 04.11.01.651 (1) 4:3 04.11.01-565 (1) 9:14 1 1 (2) 3:15;43:5 1/8th (6) 42:2,3,3;51:13,19,20	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24) 7:7,9,11,16,17,19,22,24;8:1, 3,10,12,14,16,18,19,21,22,24, 25;9:2,3,8;20:25 24 (8) 3:16;8:12;23:4,8;26:17; 27:11;55:13,17 28 (2) 8:14,16	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24 9	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1) 39:3 04.11.01.651 (1) 4:3 04.11.01-565 (1) 9:14 1 1 (2) 3:15;43:5 1/8th (6)	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24) 7:7,9,11,16,17,19,22,24;8:1, 3,10,12,14,16,18,19,21,22,24, 25;9:2,3,8;20:25 24 (8) 3:16;8:12;23:4,8;26:17; 27:11;55:13,17 28 (2) 8:14,16 3 3 (2) 21:1,10	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24 9	
years (7) 17:12,13,18;37:14;44:23; 58:16,22 yield (1) 30:25 Z Zoom (7) 3:4;4:1,2,5,20;22:18;58:3 0 002 (1) 39:3 01-001 (1) 39:3 04.11.01-565 (1) 9:14 1 1 (2) 3:15;43:5 1/8th (6) 42:2,3,3;51:13,19,20 10 (1)	47:1 20-0702 (2) 24:9;53:23 2021 (1) 58:20 2021-OGR-01-02 (1) 39:3 2022 (1) 28:12 2023 (6) 3:8;4:25;7:7,9,13;67:9 21 (2) 7:24;8:1 22 (3) 8:3,10;28:12 23 (24) 7:7,9,11,16,17,19,22,24;8:1, 3,10,12,14,16,18,19,21,22,24, 25;9:2,3,8;20:25 24 (8) 3:16;8:12;23:4,8;26:17; 27:11;55:13,17 28 (2) 8:14,16 3 3 (2)	8:22 640 (2) 62:24;63:6 640-acre (2) 62:11;67:3 67-5252 (1) 21:10 6th (2) 9:8,24 8 8 (1) 3:16 8th (1) 8:24 9	