

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Bill Barrett Corporation (BBC) proposes to drill ten wells in Natrona County, Wyoming, approximately 12 miles south/southwest of Waltman, Wyoming, in Sections 15, 21, 22, 27, and 28, Township 34 North, Range 87 West (Figure 1.1) within and directly adjacent to the Wallace Creek Unit. The ten proposed wells would be drilled to test the potential for commercial production from the Upper Cretaceous Raderville Formation (approximate depths of 7,650 feet). Any gas produced from these wells would be transported via a proposed replacement (new) gathering system to an expanded BBC compressor station located in the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 22, Township 34 North, Range 87 West.

### **1.1 PURPOSE AND NEED**

The purpose of the proposed drilling program is to explore for and develop potential natural gas reserves underlying existing oil and gas leases issued by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). National mineral leasing policies and the regulations by which they are enforced recognize the statutory right of lease holders to develop federal mineral resources to meet continuing national needs and economic demands as long as unnecessary and undue environmental degradation is not incurred.

Natural gas is an integral part of the U.S. energy future due to its availability and the presence of an existing market delivery infrastructure. By developing domestic reserves of clean burning natural gas, the U.S. would reduce dependence on foreign sources of energy and maintain an adequate and stable supply of fuel to maintain economic well-being, industrial production, and national security. The use of natural gas in industrial applications would result in lower air pollutant emissions than the comparable use of other fossil fuels (e.g., coal, diesel, or other petroleum products), and the environmental advantages of burning natural gas are emphasized in the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990.

### **1.2 RELATIONSHIP TO POLICIES, PLANS, AND PROGRAMS**

This environmental assessment (EA) has been prepared in accordance with the *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969*, as amended (NEPA) and is in compliance with all applicable regulations and laws passed subsequent thereto, including the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), USDI requirements contained in *Department Manual 516, Environmental Quality* (USDI 1980), guidelines listed in the *BLM Manual Handbook, H-1790-1* (BLM 1988), and *Guidelines for Assessing and Documenting Cumulative Impacts* (BLM 1994). This EA assesses the environmental impacts of the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative, and will serve to guide the decision-making process.

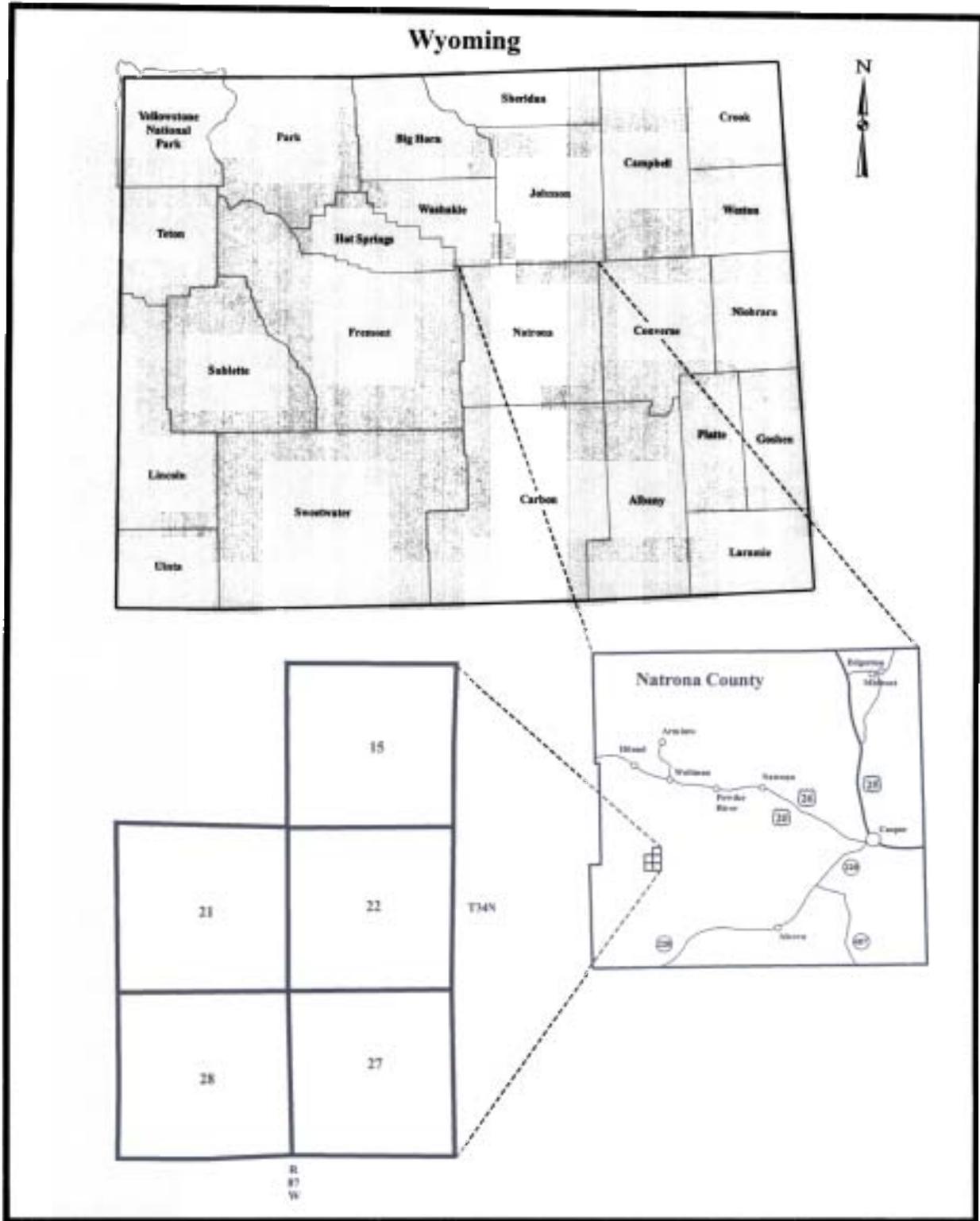


Figure 1.1: General Vicinity Map

Policies for development and land use decisions within this area are contained in the Final Platte River Resource Area (PRRA) Resource Management Plan (RMP) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) (BLM 1985). The proposed project is in accordance with the PRRA RMP and no amendment to the RMP would be /necessary to approve the proposed project.

A tiered approach to environmental review is used by the BLM in the leasing, exploration, and development of mineral resources. Initial environmental review occurs during BLM land use planning, during which the appropriateness of leasing and stipulations for development are identified with public input. Accordingly, the federal minerals within the project area that have been leased to BBC carry a contractual commitment to allow for their development in accordance with the terms and conditions of each respective lease. The BLM has the authority to deny individual APDs and ROW applications; however, the lessees' right to drill and develop somewhere within the leasehold cannot be denied. Pursuant to the *Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976* (FLPMA), the BLM also has the authority and responsibility to protect the environment within federal oil and gas leases; therefore, restrictions may be imposed on lease terms. However, mitigation measures that would render a proposed operation uneconomical or unfeasible are not consistent with the lessee's rights and cannot be required unless they are included as a lease stipulation or are necessary to prevent unnecessary and undue degradation of public lands or resources (BLM Instruction Memorandum 92-67).

All mineral actions would comply with established goals, objectives, and resource restrictions (mitigations) required to protect natural resource values in the planning area. Resources, impacts, and associated mitigation and monitoring measures on federal, state, and private lands within the project area will be addressed in this EA.