

*Environmental Protection in the Federal
Coal Leasing Program*

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Foreword

This report responds to a request by the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, as mandated in the Conference Committee Report on the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 1984, to assess the ability of the Federal coal leasing program to ensure the development of leases in an environmentally compatible manner. This study builds on earlier OTA reports, *An Assessment of the Development and Production Potential of Federal Coal Leases* and *The Direct Use of Coal*, and will contribute to future work on surface mine reclamation.

The assessment addresses the recent controversy surrounding the implementation of the environmental protection aspects of the Federal coal leasing program. It discusses the adequacy of the regulatory provisions of the program to ensure the environmental compatibility of Federal lease tracts, including the 1982 changes in program policy and regulations. **The Bureau of Land Management's implementation of the leasing program legislation and regulations is evaluated, with emphasis on the adequacy of data and analyses to support land use planning and environmental impact assessment. The report assesses the characteristics of tracts proposed** for leasing since 1979, to determine whether any of those tracts will be particularly difficult to develop under current environmental laws and regulations. It also assesses the potential for cumulative environmental impacts upon the development of several lease tracts in one area. Finally, the report presents policy options Congress could consider that seek to restore predictability and stability to the leasing program.

In the course of this assessment, OTA drew on the expertise of many individuals and organizations. In particular, we are grateful for the generous assistance of the workshop participants and the project's contractors, who prepared background analyses. We would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the numerous reviewers who gave their time to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of this report. Finally, we are especially grateful to the Bureau of Land Management and its field personnel, without whose cheerful and candid cooperation this assessment would not have been possible.



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NOTE: The workshop participants provided advice and comment throughout the assessment, but the members do not necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this report, for which OTA assumes full responsibility.

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