15.0 ALTERNATIVES TO THIS DEVELOPMENT

15.1 The "No Action Alternative"

The "No Action" alternative is not regarded as a tenable option given the existing Production Sharing Agreement between US Capital Energy and the Government of Belize signed on the 22nd of January 2001. The contractor is required to carry out all exploration activities stipulated in the PSA within a specified time period of two (2) years called the "initial exploration period" and subject to the conditions provided three (3) successive renewal periods. Granting of any "renewal periods" is subject to the need to complete the drilling testing or appraisal of any well.

Since the agreement was signed in 2001, the company has been way behind schedule in carrying out the exploration activities as called for in the PSA and must therefore proceed forthwith in carrying out its obligation.

The no-action alternative would mean that development in the region continues along the present trajectory. This would mean no change in the dire economic situation in the region, and continued heavy reliance of the people on extractive activities such as hunting and fishing to meet their daily upkeep requirements. At the present time most people in the project area are engaged in milpa farming and some in cattle farming. As the population increases rapidly the intensity of these activities will only continue, leading to mass deforestation, and soil degradation with significant negative implications for the region's water resources and continued pressure and isolation of the STNP within the larger landscape.

15.2 Other Alternatives for Development

Tourism has been suggested as a possible alternative for this project by certain regional stakeholders. This industry would be entirely dependent on the local resource base and is non-extractive while being labor intensive and tending towards conservation and wise use of natural resources. At the present time tourism in southern Belize is in its infancy with no clear indication that it will take off in the near future and the region on a whole does not offer

a unique product vis a vis the rest of the country. In addition, this industry would have to start from scratch with considerable inward investments and risk required.

The discovery of oil in the region could dramatically change the local socioeconomic setting, bringing in rapid investments, jobs and technology which the region so sorely lacks and which holds back the economic advancement of the people while relieving pressure on the local natural resources. Belize, like most of the developing world, is undergoing dramatic changes which are transforming it socially and economically. The government is under pressure to improve the standard of living of the people. The exploitation of our petroleum resources stands out as one of our most promising avenues to growth. As always, the more relevant issue is how to steer this growth in a sustainable direction so that it will do the most good for all the national stakeholders while at the same time protecting and enhancing the local natural environment.

15.3 Justification of the Chosen Alternative

Having decided to proceed with this project there are few other viable approaches that the developer could use to acquire the seismic data other that those already described. In the first instance, seismic testing for the presence of suitable structures for petroleum exploration is an industry standard universally applied throughout the world and is by far the most widely used method of all the options available.

The methods to be used for the seismic test as outlined in this ES are also industry standards including the use of the 2D seismic test. There is no alternative to the cutting of the lines which would still be able to cover the area adequately, overcome limitations of topography and vegetation cover and would give the reliable results that the investor needs to have before he can select his drill sites. The clearing of the cut-lines as laid out in this report is the minimum width which the developer believes is required for the safe passage of men and equipment and which should allow the forest to rapidly close the gap once the seismic studies are completed. It will take between 6 months to a year for the lines to be re-colonize by vegetation in open areas such as low secondary forest and open areas and between 2 -3 years under closed forest canopy.

In the same vein the use of sound charges for detonation to produce the seismic waves is industry standard and will be as low impact as the present technology allows with each charge weighing only 1kg and contained within a biodegradable casing.

Compressors mounted on boats or in a truck will be used to power the drills used to create the hole for the charges. Individual compressors will have hoses running up to 2km to reduce the need to carry power generating machinery through the park. This is the most relevant and eco friendly technology available for this task.

During this phase the project will make maximum use of existing infrastructure and as such will leave a small footprint. This will include the use of the existing road network, and communication facilities. Water transport will be used wherever possible to reduce impacts on land.

A benefit that will arise from the trails through the unique ecosystem of The Tropical evergreen lowland peat shrubland with sphagnum is the opportunity to organize a scientific research team. This team will form part of the drilling team while going through this ecosystem and be able to collect scientific data to better understand such a unique value zone of some 2,700 acres.

Conclusions

- The impacts that the seismic study are temporary and can be mitigated.
- The developer will have to finance all expenses for the proper monitoring of the mitigation measures as prescribed by the environmental compliance plan.
- The scientific expedition to this unique zone will help biologist to gather important data to better understand the origins of this special ecosystem.

Recommendations

We recommend that:

- The National Environmental Appraisal Committee (NEAC) grant environmental clearance for this seismic survey

- The developer, through the Department of Environment and Forestry negotiate finances that will enable SATIIM to do proper monitoring during the implementation of the ECP and post monitoring after completion of the project.
- All agreed cost or charges to be borne by the developer should form part of the ECP.