



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

March 24, 2005

Ms. Noelle C. Letteri
Legal Services Division
Texas General Land Office
P.O. Box 12873
Austin, Texas 78701-1495

OR2005-02554

Dear Ms. Letteri:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 220725.

The Texas General Land Office (the "land office") received a request for eight categories of information related to seismic work being performed in Tres Palacios Bay. You state that the land office will release the majority of the requested information to the requestor. However, you claim that portions of such information may contain proprietary information subject to exception under the Act. Pursuant to section 552.305(d) of the Government Code, you have notified interested third party Brigham Exploration Company ("Brigham") of the request and of its opportunity to submit comments to this office. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305 (permitting interested third party to submit to attorney general reasons why requested information should not be released); Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (determining that statutory predecessor to section 552.305 permits governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception to disclosure in certain circumstances). We have considered the submitted arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Brigham argues that the submitted maps are excepted from disclosure under section 552.113 of the Government Code. Section 552.113 provides in relevant part as follows:

- (a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is:

....

(2) geological or geophysical information or data, including maps concerning wells, except information filed in connection with an application or proceeding before an agency[.]

Gov't Code § 552.113(a)(2). In Open Records Decision No. 627 (1994), this office concluded that section 552.113(a)(2) protects from public disclosure only commercially valuable geological and geophysical information regarding the exploration or development of natural resources. Open Records Decision No. 627 at 3-4 (1994) (overruling rationale of Open Records Decision No. 504 (1988)). *See also* Open Records Decision No. 669 (2000). The land office advises us that the submitted information is commercially valuable. As such, upon review, we find that Brigham and the land office have demonstrated that the submitted information is commercially valuable geological or geophysical information regarding the exploration or development of natural resources. Accordingly, we conclude the land office must withhold the submitted information pursuant to section 552.113. As our ruling is dispositive, we need not consider Brigham's other claimed exception to disclosure.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

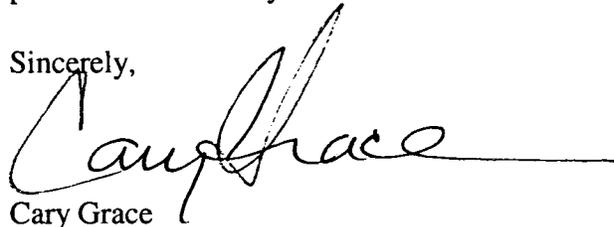
If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental

body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Tex. Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Cary Grace
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ECG/jev

Ref: ID# 220725

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. Curtis Warchesik
303 East Bayshore Drive
Palacios, Texas 77465
(w/o enclosures)

Mr. Warren J. Ludlow
General Counsel
Brigham Exploration Company
6300 Bridge Point Parkway, Building. 2, Suite 500
Austin, Texas 78730
(w/o enclosures)