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Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

Intermountain Region

Humboldt-Toiyabe  
National Forest

Austin-Tonopah  
Ranger Districts

July 2009

**Scoping Document**  
**For the King Solomon Exploration Project**  
**Nye County, Nevada**

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# 1 Introduction

Cougar Gold, LLC (Cougar Gold) has submitted a mining plan of operations for exploration activities on National Forest System lands as described below. This scoping document is part of the public involvement process for the proposed King Solomon Exploration Project (Project). The purpose of this document is to provide initial information on the proposed Project and to invite your comments. Public, Tribal and agency involvement is encouraged and is used for identifying issues that are relevant to this project.

The 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and its implementing regulations define the environmental analysis process. The Forest Service is the lead agency for the project. The analysis would be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA).

## 1.1 Location

The King Solomon Exploration Project is approximately 50 miles northeast of Tonopah, Nevada. Project access from Tonopah is via U.S. Highway 6 to NFD 405, NFD 006, and NFD 093. The Project can also be accessed from Tonopah via paved U.S. Highway 6 to Nevada State Route 376 to gravel County Road 82 to Belmont. From Belmont, Project access is via NFD 005 and NFD 093.

The project area is located within:

- Township 9 North, Range 47 East, portions of sections 25 and 36;
- Township 9 North, Range 47 ½ East, portion of section 36;
- Township 9 North, Range 48 East, portion of Section 31;
- Township 8 North, Range 47 ½ East, portions of sections 1 and 12.

Figure 1 presents the claim blocks on which the Project is located.

## 1.2 Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of the Project is to determine if economic gold resources are present within the project area while ensuring the protection of natural resources.

The General Mining Law of 1872, as amended provides Cougar Gold the statutory right to explore for and develop mineral resources on federally administered lands. Forest Service surface management regulations for locatable minerals (36 CFR 228.8) require that all mineral exploration, development, and operation activities minimize adverse environmental impacts on National Forest surface resources, where feasible. The Forest Plan, and other state and federal laws, regulations, and policy provide standards and guidance regarding impacts.

## 1.3 Public Involvement

Public involvement in the environmental analysis process is essential. The public is now invited to submit written comments stating their concerns and issues that are relevant to the Proposed Action. Comments received from this scoping document and from personal contacts would be used to help establish the scope of the environmental analysis. Public involvement would be

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ongoing throughout the analysis process. However, in order to be most effective, scoping comments should be received within 30 days after this scoping document is received.

## 1.4 Tribal Coordination

As part of the environmental analysis process, the Forest Service would coordinate with local tribal governments regarding this project in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and Executive Order 13007. Tribal coordination would be ongoing throughout the analysis process.

# 2 Proposed Action

## 2.1 Exploration Activities

Cougar Gold is proposing to conduct exploration drilling in phases over five years. Each subsequent phase would be dependent on the results of the previous phase. The total proposed road and drill site disturbance would be approximately 24 acres including approximately 4.6 miles (24,500 feet) of road, up to 35 drill holes, a man camp, and a laydown yard. Figure 2 illustrates the anticipated exploration roads and drill sites.

**Phase I:** Up to 1.6 miles of road and up to 16 drill sites would be constructed. Multiple drill holes (vertical and angle) may be drilled from a single drill site, and the holes may be drilled with reverse circulation or core drill rigs. The average underlying slope where exploration roads would be constructed is approximately 30 percent.

**Subsequent Phases:** Subsequent exploration activities within the Project boundary may include up to three miles of exploration roads and up to 19 drill sites with associated sumps, where necessary. The actual amount of disturbance associated with future exploration roads and future drills sites as well as actual disturbance locations are dependent upon drill results from Phase I. Multiple holes may be drilled from a single drill site, and drill holes may be vertical or angle drilled with reverse circulation or core drill rigs. Drill holes would be an average of 1,000 feet in depth. Drill holes would be surveyed and plugged as an operational procedure immediately after completion of drilling in accordance with NAC 534. Specifics of future exploration activities would be provided in annual work plans to be submitted by March 31.

Exploration activities within the five-year period may consist of up to ten acres of disturbance during each year of the Project life unless otherwise approved by the Forest Service. Specifics (drill site locations, exploration road locations, amount of disturbance, reclamation locations and amounts, etc...) of annual exploration activities would be provided in annual work plans to be submitted by March 31.

**Time Frame:** The decision resulting from this analysis is expected to be completed by the fourth quarter of 2009. Exploration activities would be initiated thereafter as determined by scheduling and weather.

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## 2.2 Environmental Protection Measures

Environmental protection measures are proposed to avoid or minimize negative effects to resources surrounding and within the project area. Key measures include:

### Air Quality

- Dust from roads would be minimized by encouraging contractors and staff to minimize trips to and from the drill rig on a daily basis.

### Water Quality

- Sediment control structures, including fabric and/or straw bale filter fences, siltation or filter berms, mud sumps, and down gradient drainage channels would be used.
- Sediment traps (sumps) would be constructed as necessary adjacent to the drill sites to settle cuttings and prevent their release.
- Project activities would avoid springs and seeps.
- All bladed roads would have water bars constructed, as needed.
- Cougar Gold would prevent debris from entering stream courses, and in the event debris enters stream courses in any amount that may adversely affect the natural flow of the stream and water quality, Cougar Gold would remove the debris within 48 hours in a manner agreed to with the Forest Service that would minimize disturbance to stream courses.
- Wheeled or tracked equipment would not be operated in streams except at crossings approved by the Forest Service.

### Vegetation

- Disturbed areas would be reclaimed to restore habitat.
- Disturbance within the known population of Toiyabe buckwheat would be minimized to ensure population viability.

### Wildlife

- Raptor nests identified during a wildlife survey in the project area would be avoided during the project.

### Migratory Birds

- A migratory bird nest survey would be conducted yearly within potential breeding habitat prior to any surface disturbance before June 30.

### Noxious Weeds

- Implement noxious weed assessment prevention measures.
  - Wash all vehicles entering the project area.
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## Cultural Resources

- Cultural resources would be avoided by exploration activities in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- Previously unidentified cultural resources discovered by drilling operations would be appropriately protected in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

## Public Safety

- All equipment and other facilities would be maintained in a safe and orderly manner.
- Signs would be posted at the entrance of roads that access the project area when exploration activities are in progress.

## 2.3 Reclamation and Monitoring

The intent is to reclaim the project area to a beneficial land use, prevent unnecessary degradation of the environment, and reclaim disturbed areas to ensure visual and functional compatibility with surrounding areas. Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 36 CFR 228.8(g). Exploration drill sites and temporary roads would be recontoured to approximate the original shape of the ground prior to drill site construction and to blend with the surrounding area. The area would then be reseeded with a Forest Service-approved certified weed-free seed mix at the appropriate time of year and at an application rate for optimum seed sprouting and plant growth. The seeding would be completed using a broadcast method, and the seed would be covered by harrowing, raking or covered by other site-specific appropriate methods. The reclaimed surfaces would be left in a textured or rough condition. Sumps would be backfilled with spoil material and the surface would be seeded in accordance with the methods described above. Seeded areas would be monitored for stability and revegetation success, during the spring or fall, for a minimum of three years until attainment of the revegetation standards established in the Nevada Guidelines for Successful Revegetation for the NDEP, the Bureau of Land Management, and the USDA Forest Service (Instruction Memorandum #NV-13).

During the exploration program, reclamation activities would involve management of drilling procedures to contain cuttings and drilling fluids and to keep worksites clean and safe. Concurrent reclamation of roads and drill sites would be done to the extent possible during operations. Final reclamation would be completed within one year of project completion, temporary shut-down, non-use, or abandonment. The Forest Service would be notified before the commencement of final reclamation work.

Drill holes would be plugged in accordance with Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) 534.4371.4. If ground water is encountered, the hole would be plugged pursuant to NAC 534.4371.2. Drill holes would be plugged prior to the drill rig moving from the drill site. In the event that no personnel are on site for extended periods of time, all drill holes, including partially completed holes, would be plugged.

Throughout the project, Cougar Gold would cooperate with the Forest Service to inventory and monitor noxious weeds/undesirable plants within areas of disturbance.

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### **3 Other Alternatives**

The Forest Service is required to address the No Action Alternative, even though it fails to meet the Project purpose. Under the No Action Alternative the Forest Service would not authorize the proposed exploration activities. Cougar Gold would continue exploration activities under existing authorizations.

### **4 Preliminary Issues**

The Forest Interdisciplinary Team has identified the following preliminary issues related to the Proposed Action:

1. Water Quality – Potential impacts to surface water quality as a result of erosion and sedimentation.
2. Wildlife including migratory birds – Potential impacts to mule deer, nesting raptors, and other species resulting from the presence of humans, habitat loss, and noise from the Project.
3. Inventoried Roadless Areas – Potential impacts to the roadless character and wilderness attributes of the roadless area as a result of Project activities.
4. Recreational Opportunities – Potential impacts to access in the project area for hunters and other dispersed recreationists as a result of drilling operations in the area.
5. Wilderness – Potential impacts to the character and attributes of the adjacent Table Mountain Wilderness Area as a result of Project activities.
6. Vegetation – Potential impacts from the removal of native vegetation and the potential for the establishment of invasive, non-native species on disturbed areas.
7. Rare Plants – Potential impacts to rare plant populations from surface-disturbing activities.
8. Cultural Resources – Potential impacts to cultural resources from surface-disturbing activities.

### **5 Analysis Process**

#### **5.1 Environmental Analysis**

An environmental analysis of the proposed Project would be conducted by comparing the existing physical, biological, social and economic aspects of the Project with proposed changes that may impact these existing conditions. The analysis is used to identify, predict, evaluate, and mitigate potential impacts to physical, biological, and other relevant effects of development proposals prior to major decisions being taken and commitments made by the regulatory officials. The process also gives the public a chance to identify potential concerns about the Project, and gives the proponent the ability to address those concerns in a cooperative manner such that all parties are confident that the Project would operate and close in a manner that is environmentally protective. This analysis would be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA)

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## 5.2 Notice of Proposed Action

In accordance with Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215, the public would be provided with a 30-day public comment period. The responsible official has the discretion to select the appropriate time for inviting public comment. A *Notice of Proposed Action* document would be mailed to interested parties.

## 5.3 Decision Framework

Based on the environmental analysis and disclosure documented in the EA, the deciding officer would determine if there are any significant impacts due to the proposed exploration activities. If no significant impacts are expected, then a Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact would be issued. If it is determined that significant impacts may occur, then additional studies would be undertaken, and an environmental impact statement prepared. Following completion of the environmental impact statement, a Record of Decision would be signed.

# 6 Scoping Comment Guidance

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the Proposed Action, comments or suggestions should be as specific as possible. It is also helpful if comments refer to specific events, conditions, or practices, whenever possible.

Comments may also address the Proposed Action, issues, and alternatives described in this scoping document. Reviewers may wish to refer to the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

In order to be most helpful, we are asking that comments be received by August 24, 2009. Comments received, including the names and addresses of those who comment, would be considered part of the public record on this proposal and would be available for public inspection.

Submit written, oral, or hand delivered comments to:

Steven Williams, District Ranger  
USDA Forest Service  
Austin-Tonopah Ranger Districts  
P.O. Box 130  
Austin, NV 89310  
Phone: 775-964-2671  
Fax: 775-964-1451

Electronic comments can be sent to:

[comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-austin-tonopah@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-austin-tonopah@fs.fed.us)

Please put "King Solomon" in subject line of your e-mail.

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## 7 Contacts

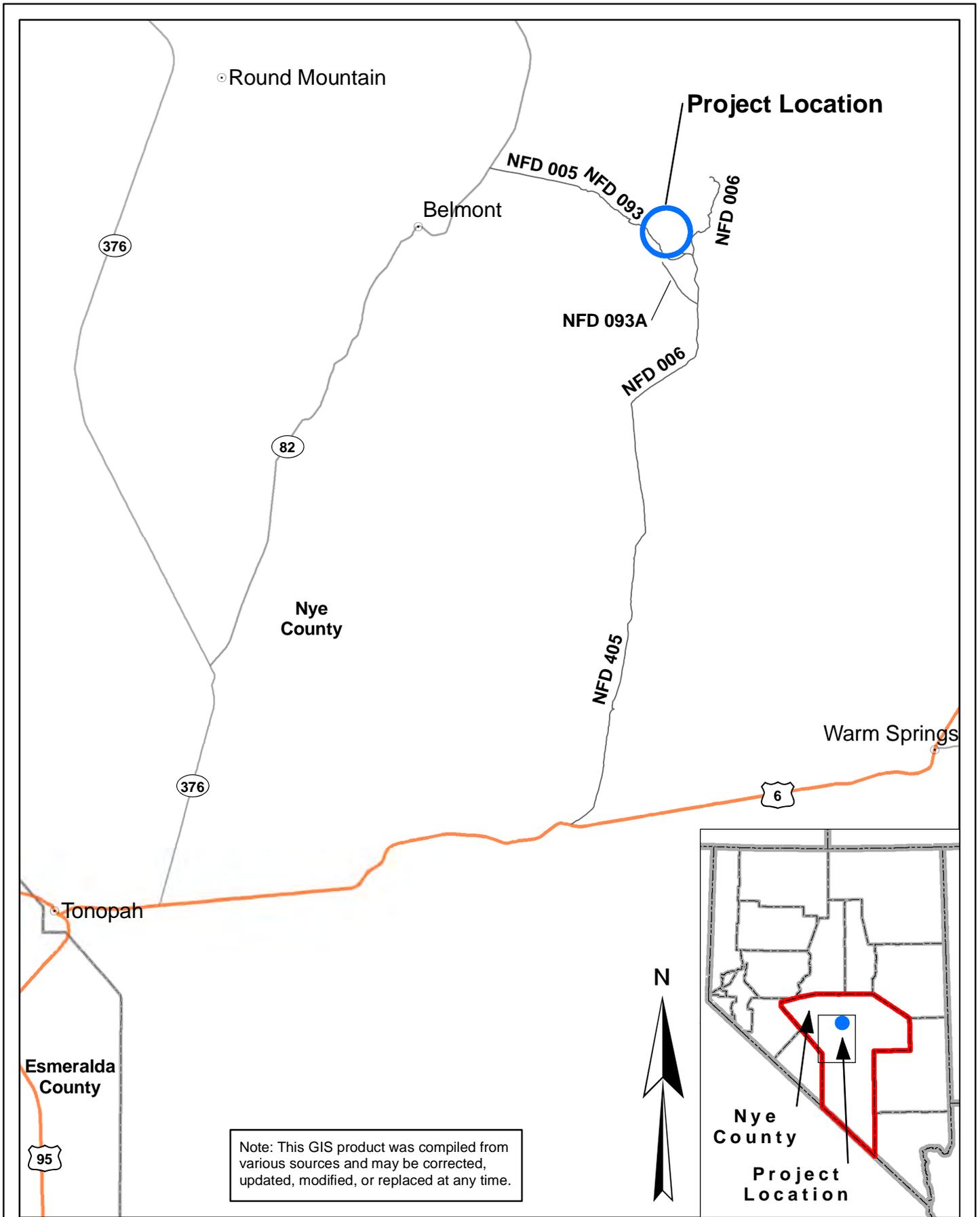
For additional information, please contact:

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# FIGURES

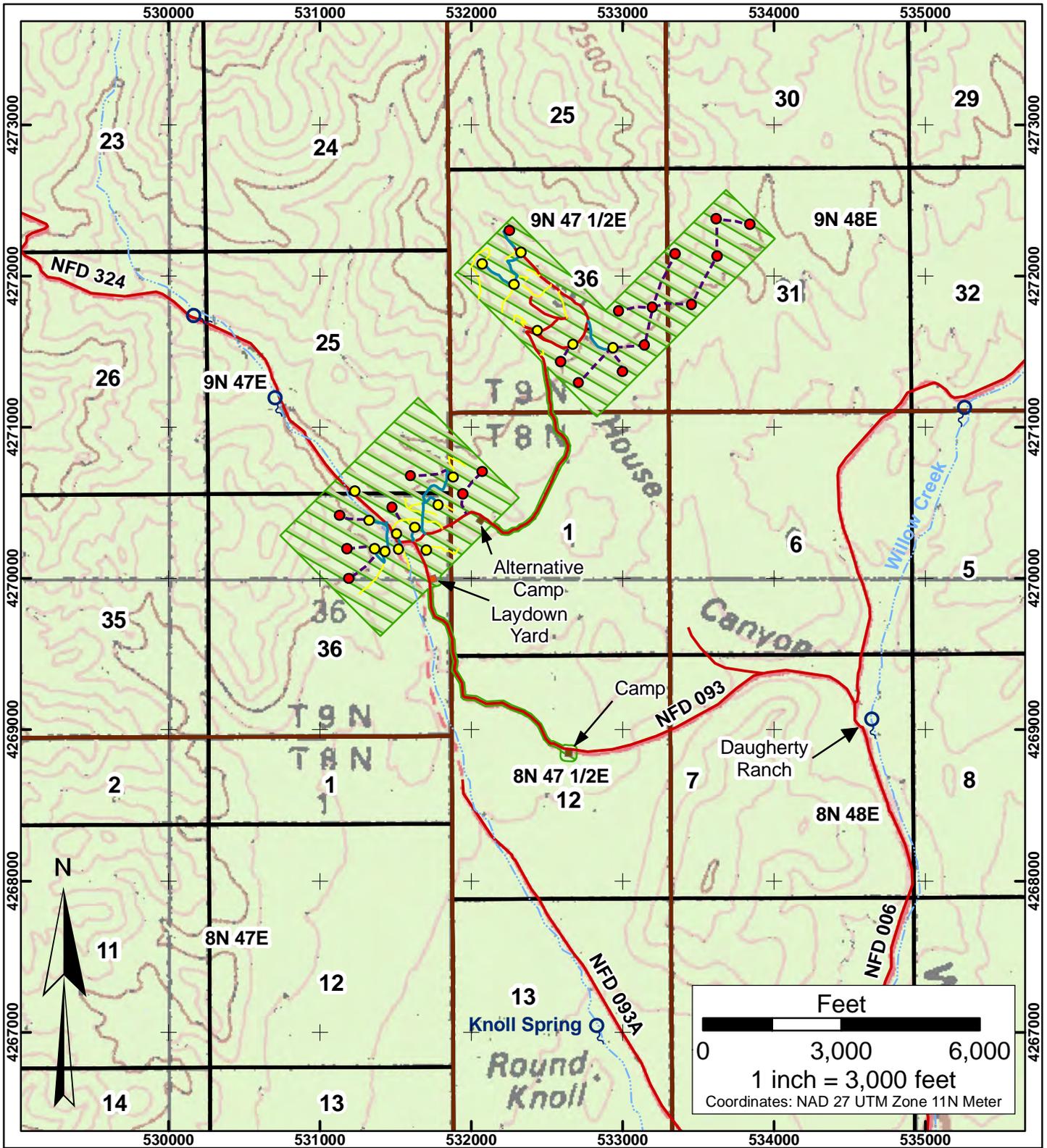


Note: This GIS product was compiled from various sources and may be corrected, updated, modified, or replaced at any time.

			
DESIGN:	RK	DRAWN:	BVB
CHECKED:	RK	APPROVED:	VS
FILE NAME:	Fig01_Location_Map.mxd		
REVIEWED:	VS	DATE:	06/17/2009

**KING SOLOMON  
SCOPING DOCUMENT  
COUGAR GOLD LLC**

DRAWING TITLE:		
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>		
DRAWING NO.	<b>FIGURE 1</b>	SHEET 1 OF 1
SRK JOB NO.	<b>184101-200</b>	REVISION NO. <b>B</b>



- Spring
- Phase 1 Drill Site
- Existing Road
- Future Road
- Ephemeral Drainage
- Subsequent Phase Drill Site
- Reclaimed Road
- Proposed Road
- Project Area

Note: This GIS product was compiled from various sources and may be corrected, updated, modified, or replaced at any time.

**SRK Consulting**  
Engineers and Scientists

DESIGN: RK	DRAWN: BVB	REVIEWED: VS
CHECKED: RK	APPROVED: VS	DATE: 07/07/2009
FILE NAME: Fig02 Proj Area BVB_20090707.mxd		

## KING SOLOMON SCOPING DOCUMENT COUGAR GOLD LLC

DRAWING TITLE: **PROPOSED DISTURBANCE**

DRAWING NO. <b>FIGURE 2</b>	SHEET <b>1 OF 1</b>	REVISION NO. <b>B</b>
SRK JOB NO. <b>184101-400</b>		