

# **Scoping Document**

## **Timber Hill Exploration Project**

**USDA Forest Service  
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest  
Tonopah Ranger District  
Nye County, Nevada**

**March 2011**



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## Attachments

**Figure 1:** Project Location

**Figure 2:** Proposed Disturbance

**Figure 3:** Timber Hill from State Route 377

**Figure 4:** Timber Hill from Old Manhattan Gulch Road

**Figure 5:** Beginning of Forest Road 456

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## 1. Comments Welcome

The Tonopah Ranger District of the Humbolt-Toiyabe National Forest welcomes your comments on the Timber Hill Exploration Project (Project) proposed by the Round Mountain Gold Corporation (RMGC). The Project would consist of: improvements to existing access roads; construction of new exploration roads, drill sites, and drill-fluid sumps; and some cross-country travel by exploration vehicles. Total Project-related disturbance would be up to approximately 11.3 acres.

The Forest Service is now seeking public comments specific to the proposed Project. The purpose of the comment period is to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (as amended) (NEPA) regarding public scoping.

## 2. Location

The Project would be located on National Forest System lands in Nye County, Nevada, within the Humboldt Toiyabe National Forest, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Tonopah Ranger District. The proposed Project area encompasses approximately 710 acres, of which approximately 20 acres are on patented mining claims controlled by RMGC. The Project is located within:

- Township 8 North, Range 43 East, portion of Section 36; and
- Township 7 North, Range 43 East, portion of Section 1.

The general location of the Project is illustrated on Figure 1, with access routes presented on Figure 2. Primary access would be west and southeast from the town of Manhattan via about 11,100 feet of existing roads on Forest Service-administered lands, including Forest Service System Road 24212 along Old Manhattan Gulch. A possible alternative access to the southern part of the Project area would be via Forest Service System Road 44456 south from Manhattan, then onto an existing Non-System Road on Forest Service-administered lands, for approximately 1,200 feet to the Project area. The mineral exploration equipment (including drill rigs, service trucks, and pickup trucks) would use these routes in order to access the proposed drilling locations. Figures 3 through 5 show the typical Project area landscape.

## 3. Purpose Of and Need for Action

The purpose of and need for the Project is to identify and delineate gold ore deposits, specifically through subsurface exploratory drilling on National Forest System lands in the Project area. The statutory right of RMGC to explore for and develop mineral resources on federally-administered lands is recognized in the General Mining Law of 1872, and is consistent with the Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan of 1986 (IV-50). Surface management regulations (36 CFR part 228) require that all mineral exploration, development, and operation activities be conducted in a manner that minimizes adverse environmental impacts on National Forest surface resources (36 CFR part 228.8).

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## 4. Decision Framework

Based on the environmental analysis and disclosure documented in the Environmental Assessment (EA) currently being prepared, the Deciding Official would decide: 1) whether to select the Proposed Action as proposed or modified, or as described in an alternative; 2) what mitigation measures may be needed; and 3) what monitoring is required.

## 5. The Proposed Action

### Use of Existing roads

Approximately 4,900 feet of existing roads would require some form of improvement, including grading/blading to a running surface width of 12 feet.

### Temporary Drill Road Construction

The Project proponent proposes to construct up to 19,900 feet of new roads in order to access the drill sites. Roads would be constructed with a running surface of approximately 12 feet to accommodate the drill rig and support vehicles anticipated for the Project. These roads would be constructed as balanced cut and fill. Drainage structures, including water bars and rolling dips, would be placed as necessary to reduce erosion.

### Drill Holes

Maximum drill-hole depths are estimated to be approximately 1,500 feet below ground surface (bgs). Depending on sample assay results, the hole depths may be extended.

### Drilling Locations

Each of the proposed 34 drilling locations would require a pad approximately 40 feet by 70 feet, except where a site can be located on an existing road or access route to another site. Between one and three holes may be drilled at each drill location.

Each drilling location would require the construction of a sump (10 feet × 20 feet × 8 feet deep), to contain drill cuttings and fluids from each drill hole. Due to the rocky nature of some drilling locations, 12 sumps may be constructed off the drill pads. Sumps would be constructed with exit ramps for the protection of livestock or wildlife that may inadvertently enter the sumps.

### Equipment

Mechanized equipment proposed for the project includes: one tracked or articulated, rubber-tired buggy drill rig (30 feet long × 10 feet wide or smaller); one pipe truck with all-terrain, rubber tires (30 feet long × 11 feet wide); one, 2,000-gallon water truck with all-terrain, rubber tires; and one D6 dozer with a 12-foot wide blade. Other supporting vehicles may include: three, four-wheel drive pickup trucks. The water truck would make three to five trips per day to the site from the town of Manhattan; pickups would make two to three trips per day. One pickup would be used for fueling and servicing the other equipment.

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### Overall Disturbance

Disturbance has been calculated to include road cuts and fills with consideration for the underlying slopes. The total anticipated disturbance for this drill program would be approximately 11.3 acres which would include:

- Approximately 10.3 acres of new road (19,900 feet × 12 feet wide) and drill site construction [(34 pads × 40 feet × 70 feet) + (12 sumps × 20 feet × 10 feet)]; and
- Approximately one acre of existing roads that require improvements (i.e., blading) (4,900 feet × 12 feet wide).

### Reclamation

Upon completion of drilling, all equipment and supplies would be removed from the project area. The drill holes would be plugged and abandoned according to the regulatory requirement set forth in Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) 534.4369, NAC 534.4371, NAC 534.4373, and NAC 534.4375. If any unusual groundwater conditions are encountered (e.g., artesian flow) the drill hole would be sealed according to NAC 534.4375. The drill pads and sumps would be regraded to pre-exploration slopes, temporary roads would be pulled back to contour, and removed soil would be spread on top of regraded areas. An approved Forest Service seed mix would be applied.

## **6. Environmental Protection Measures**

Environmental protection measures are proposed to avoid or minimize potential negative effects to resources surrounding and within the Project area. Specific measures currently include, but are not necessarily limited to:

### Air Quality

Dust control would be accomplished by watering access routes as necessary. A minimal amount of limb trimming and removal of trees is anticipated for access roads and in areas where existing roads experience overgrowth; no burning of slash is planned. Disturbed areas would be reclaimed to restore vegetative cover.

### Water Quality

Approximately 100,000 gallons of water would be used over the life of the Project as a drilling lubricant, to carry the cuttings to the surface of the drill holes, and for dust suppression. Water would be obtained from the town of Manhattan or from the Round Mountain Mine (approximately 20 miles away). There would be no diversion of surface water. Water would be stored in a water truck with a 2,000-gallon capacity and transportable plastic or metal tanks with a capacity of approximately 250 gallons. Drill fluids and cuttings would be contained in drill sumps to ensure they do not enter surface waters drainages. Roads would be constructed using water bars and other best management practices (i.e., certified weed-free straw bales, silt fences, or other measures as appropriate) to minimize runoff and control erosion. Disturbed areas would be reclaimed to restore vegetative cover and to reduce the erosional potential for these areas.

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### Solid Wastes

Drill cuttings and drilling product packaging would be the only solid waste generated by the Project. Cuttings would be impounded in sumps. All non-hazardous trash would be taken to the county landfill (or other approved disposal facility).

### Scenic Values

Reclamation would be completed after cessation of drilling activities to minimize potential visual impacts. Drill sites would be reclaimed following drilling, and roads would be reclaimed upon completion of the Project.

### Wildlife and Vegetation

Qualified biologists would be contracted by RMGC to complete a biological evaluation as part of the analysis process. The biological evaluation would identify the existing flora and fauna within the Project area including threatened, endangered, and otherwise sensitive species of special status and their potential habitats. Biological surveys would be conducted beginning on or after May 15, 2011 on the proposed Project area.

The Project construction schedule would avoid potential conflicts with migratory and breeding birds. A qualified biologist would be contracted to conduct nesting bird surveys during the avian breeding season as stipulated by the Tonopah Ranger District so as to avoid their disturbance.

Sumps would be constructed with bovine exit ramps for the protection of livestock or wildlife that may inadvertently enter the sumps. Sumps would be backfilled after use.

RMGC would implement controls to prevent the spread of noxious weeds including the identification of noxious weed stands in the vicinity and washing vehicles moving in and out of the Project area as required.

Drill sites would be reclaimed following drilling if no further development plans are implemented, and roads would be reclaimed upon completion of the Project to restore vegetation and wildlife habitat.

### Cultural Resources

Forest Service-approved archaeologists would be hired by RMGC to conduct a Class III inventory in the proposed Project area as part of the analysis process. Project construction would be designed to avoid cultural resources. If unevaluated archaeological or cultural sites or resources are encountered during Project work, activity in that area would cease immediately, the Forest Service would be notified, and the resource would be evaluated. The results of the evaluation would determine subsequent action.

### Hazardous Substances

No. 2 diesel fuel would be used for the drill rig and water truck, and unleaded gasoline or No. 2 diesel fuel would be used in the pickup trucks. Other petroleum products, such as hydraulic oil or motor oil, would be used to service equipment as necessary. Drill additives would be non-hazardous and not detrimental to the environment.

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Fuel would be transported to the Project area in metal tanks on drill support vehicles. Fueling would occur every day or every other day, as required. Drill personnel would be instructed to manage products in a proper manner and to prevent spillage during fueling and servicing operations. Drill rigs would be equipped with absorbent pads, shovels, and buckets to clean up any spills that may occur. Drill support vehicles with service tanks would have appropriate warning signs and fire extinguishers. Equipment would have Forest Service-approved spark arrestors.

Drill contractors would be required to have a proper spill response plans. RMGC would ensure that spill prevention measures are in place and containment, notification, and clean-up of any spills are accomplished as per regulation. Soils contaminated by petroleum spills would be removed and disposed of in an approved offsite waste facility.

#### Noxious Weed Prevention and Control

RMGC would implement controls to prevent the spread of noxious weeds including the identification of noxious weed stands in the vicinity and washing vehicles moving in and out of the Project area as required.

Drill sites would be reclaimed following drilling if no further development plans are implemented, and roads would be reclaimed upon completion of the Project to prevent the spread of noxious weeds.

## **7. Monitoring**

Forest Service minerals administrators would routinely monitor the operation to ensure compliance with the approved plan of operations.

During the Project, RMGC would cooperate with the Forest Service to inventory and monitor noxious weeds and undesirable plants within areas of disturbance.

At the conclusion of the Project, reclaimed areas would be monitored for at least three years to ensure successful establishment of vegetation, per the revegetation standards established in the *Nevada Guidelines for Successful Revegetation for the NDEP, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Forest Service*, are attained. Monitoring for the control of erosion and control of noxious weeds would be carried out in conjunction with reclamation monitoring.

## **8. Preliminary Issues**

The following preliminary issues have been identified for the Project by the Forest Service:

- Potential impacts to air resources;
- Potential impacts to water resources;
- Potential impacts related to hazardous substances;
- Potential impacts to wildlife;
- Potential impacts to vegetation;

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- Potential impacts to American Indian resources and sites; and
  - Potential impacts to cultural resources.

## **9. Alternatives**

Currently two alternatives are being analyzed in detail.

### The No Action Alternative

Under this alternative, the proposed Plan of Operations would not be approved by the Forest Service, and RMGC would not conduct exploration activities. Conditions at the Project area would remain unchanged.

### The Proposed Action Alternative

The Plan of Operations would be approved, and RMGC would be authorized to conduct exploration activities as proposed with up to approximately nine acres of disturbance. This alternative would include environmental protection measures, scheduling, monitoring, and reclamation as proposed under the Plan of Operations, as well as those measures agreed to in consideration of comments from the public, tribes, and the interdisciplinary team during analysis of the Proposed Action.

## **10. Comment Process**

Written comments must be submitted to:

District Ranger  
Tonopah Ranger District  
PO Box 3940  
Tonopah, NV 89049-3940

For those submitting hand-delivered or oral comments the office telephone number is 775-964-2671. Office business hours are 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Acrobat (.pdf), and Word (.doc) to:

comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-austin-tonopah@fs.fed.us

Please place “Timber Hill” in the subject line.

In order to be most useful comments should be received by April 25, 2011.

## **11. Analysis Process**

An initial review of the proposed action by the Forest Service has indicated that the preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) is needed for this project. A tentative timeline has been developed for completion of this EA. Key steps are outlined below:

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<b>Activity</b>	<b>Approximate Dates</b>
Begin Scoping	March 21, 2011
Notice of Proposed Action Document mailed	June 15, 2011
30 day public comment period	June 17 – July 18, 2011
Final EA prepared	September 5, 2011
Final Decision Notice/FONSI signed	September 15, 2011
45 day appeal period starts ( if needed)	September 20, 2011

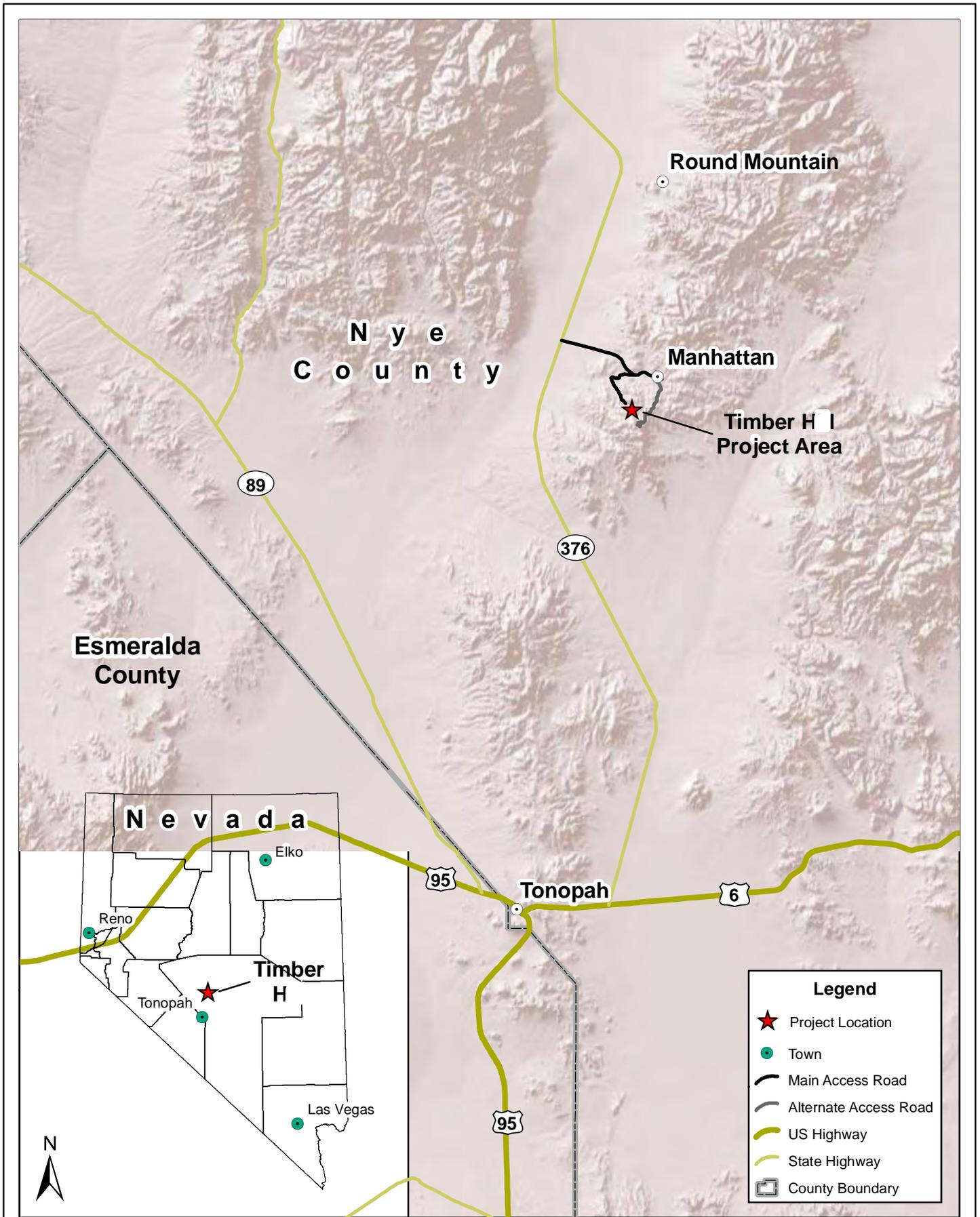
## **12. Contact**

For further information, contact Jim Rigby, Project Lead, at:

Phone: (775)-482-7887

E-mail address: jrigby@fs.fed.us

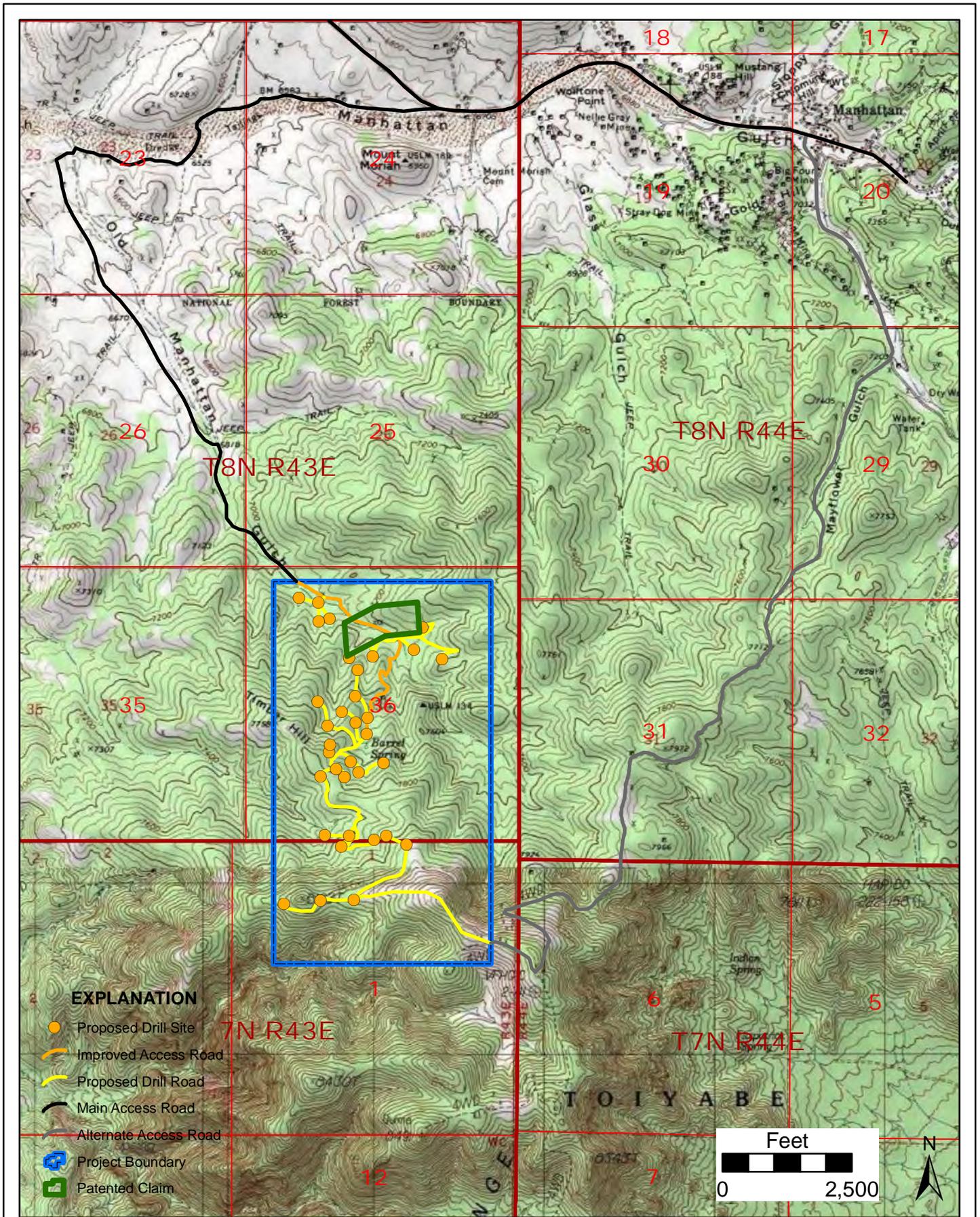
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 Humboldt-Toiyabe  
 National Forest  
 Tonopah Ranger District  
 NAD 1983 UTM Zone 11N Meter  
 SCALE: NOT TO SCALE

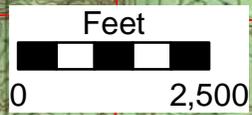
**ROUND MOUNTAIN GOLD  
 TIMBER HILL EXPLORATION  
 SCOPING DOCUMENT**

DRAWING TITLE:		<b>PROJECT          LOCATION</b>
DRAWING NO.	FIGURE 1	
DATE:	3/16/2011	
		<b>REVISION NO.          A</b>



**EXPLANATION**

- Proposed Drill Site
- Improved Access Road
- Proposed Drill Road
- Main Access Road
- Alternate Access Road
- Project Boundary
- Patented Claim




 Humboldt-Toiyabe  
 National Forest  
 Tonopah Ranger District  
 NAD 1983 UTM Zone 11N Meter  
 SCALE: 1:30,000

**ROUND MOUNTAIN GOLD  
 TIMBER HILL EXPLORATION  
 SCOPING DOCUMENT**

DRAWING TITLE:		
<b>Proposed Disturbance</b>		
DRAWING NO.	FIGURE 2	REVISION NO.
DATE:	3/16/2011	<b>A</b>

Path: G:\Sites\Timber\_Hill\Round\_Mtn\_Gold\022800\_420\_Exploration\_EA\Revision\_A\Scoping\_022800\_420\_Fig02\_PropDist\_BVB\_20110316.mxd



**Figure 3: Timber Hill from State Route 377**



**Figure 4: Timber Hill from Old Manhattan Gulch Road**



**Figure 5: Beginning of Forest Road 456**