



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

Forest Service

**Humboldt-
Toiyabe National
Forest**

Notice of Proposed Action & Opportunity to Comment

Doby George Exploration Project

**Mountain City Ranger District
Elko County
Nevada**

August, 2012

Comments Welcome

The Mountain City Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest welcomes your comments on the proposed Doby George Mineral Exploration Project (Project) which is located on National Forest System land within the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. The Project proponent (Western Exploration Inc.) proposes to construct new access roads, drill pads, and sumps in support of drilling to explore for precious metal minerals.

Written, facsimile, hand delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this proposal will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of the legal notice for this Notice of Proposed Action/Opportunity to Comment in the Elko Free Press. For detailed information on how to provide comments, please refer to the "Comment Process" section of this document on page 8.

Purpose and Need

The proponent's need is to determine if economically viable precious metals-bearing deposits exist within the proposed Project Area, and define the nature and extent, shape, and economic value of those deposits, if identified. The statutory right of the proponent 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 Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan of 1986 (IV-50). Surface management regulations (36 CFR part 228) require that all mineral exploration, development, and operations activities be conducted in a manner that minimizes adverse environmental impacts on National Forest surface resources (36 CFR part 228.8).

The Proposed Action

The project is located about 70 miles north-northwest of Elko in Elko County, Nevada. The project is located within portions of Section 1, T43N, R52E; Section 36, T44N, R52E; Section 6, T43N, R53E; and Section 31, T44N, R53E, MDB&M and covers approximately 740 acres of public land. Up to 200 acres (including the existing 39.3 acres disturbed under the existing Plan of Operations) are planned to be disturbed with drill roads and pads in a multi-phased drilling project for the next ten years. Up to approximately 20 miles of drill roads may be constructed and up to 1,000 drill holes may be drilled. Most drill holes will be less than 1,000 feet deep but some may be as deep as approximately 3,000 feet. Maps showing the project area, Phase I drill sites, land status, existing and reclaimed disturbance are enclosed.

Elevation of the Project area ranges from 6,100 feet to 6,980 feet above mean sea level (AMSL). The Project Area would be accessed from either Nevada State Routes 225 or 226 via Elko County Road 729 to Columbia Summit where existing exploration roads would be used to access the exploration site. Exploration roads to the site are in good condition.

Phase one proposal is 500 feet of new constructed, temporary road and reopening 2,233 feet of previously reclaimed road. In addition 12 new drill sites, more than one drill hole may be necessary on

each site, will be constructed. All drill holes will be plugged according to state laws. All surface disturbed by the project will be reclaimed as soon as exploration is complete and no later than November following completion of exploration.

Disturbance Type	Linear Miles	Acres
Unreclaimed drill roads and pads	14.6	36.4
Phase 1 Proposed Drill roads and Sites	0.5	1.7
Subsequent Phases		161.9

Western’s drilling will include a mixture of core and reverse circulation drills mounted on tracked or tired vehicles. These types of vehicles reduce impacts to the surface environment. Drill sites may be used in later phases thus may not be reclaimed until evaluation of drilling data is complete.

Reclamation

Upon completion of drilling, 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, 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 and raked into the soil of disturbed areas.

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 the following list.

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 private existing water rights. There would be no diversion of surface water. Water would be stored in a water truck with a 2,000-3,500 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.

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). If generated, hazardous wastes created during the exploration program would be properly disposed of offsite in approved hazardous waste facilities according to local, state, and federal regulations.

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: The Proposed Action construction schedule would avoid potential conflicts with migratory and breeding birds. 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. Western exploration Inc. 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: 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. 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. Western Exploration Inc. 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 off-site waste facility.

Monitoring

During the Project, Western Exploration Inc. would cooperate with the Forest Service to monitor all project activities. Monitoring would include but not be limited to:

- Road construction

- Drilling
- Sediment control
- Road maintenance
- Reclamation
- Noxious weed control

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.

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. The purpose of the EA is to inform the Forest Service in their evaluation of a mineral exploration project, which is a legitimate use of the multiple-use designated National Forest System land. The EA is a NEPA document that provides sufficient information on the potential impacts to the quality of the human environment to determine whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The EA will allow Forest Service resources specialists to review affected resources, even if impacts are not significant, and also provides a mechanism for developing and identifying appropriate mitigation measures.

A tentative timeline has been developed for completion of this EA. The key steps are outlined below:

Activity	Approximate Dates	Comments
Begin Scoping	May 11, 2011	Completed
Notice of Proposed Action Document mailed	August 13, 2012	
30 day public comment period	August 15–September 15, 2012	
EA prepared	September 21, 2012	
Final Decision Notice/FONSI signed	September 28, 2012	
45 day appeal period starts (if needed)	October 1, 2012	

Public scoping for the proposal was initiated in May 21, 2011 with the mailing of a “Scoping document” to a mailing list of potentially interested parties. The Forest also posted the project in its Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions which is available for viewing on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest website.

Issues

Based upon the public scoping and the ongoing analysis of Forest Service specialists, the Forest Service has identified the following key issues associated with this Proposed Action:

- **Wildlife** - Potential impacts to nesting raptors, mule deer, greater sage-grouse, and bats as a result of Project-related activities.

- **Neo-tropical Migratory Birds** - Potential impacts to migratory birds as a result of Project-related surface disturbance.
- **Water Quality** - Potential impacts to surface water quality as a result of erosion and sedimentation.
- **Cultural Resources** - Potential impacts to cultural resources as a result of Project-related surface disturbance.
- **Vegetation** - Up to 200 acres of vegetation would be removed during Project-related activities

Preliminary Effects Analysis

The following table summarizes the potential impacts of the Proposed Action. In the EA, these impacts will be compared to those resulting from the alternatives.

Affected Resource	Summary of Potential Impacts
Physical Resources	
Access and Land Use	Access and land use in the Project Area is not likely to be substantially affected by the Proposed Action. Public access due to exploration activities would generally not be altered except for temporary closures to facilitate public safety if a drill rig is located on an access road.
Air Quality	Direct, temporary impacts to air quality from fugitive dust and gaseous emissions may occur from the Proposed Action activities however operational controls would be in place to reduce these to a minimal level.
Cultural Resources	Cultural resources have been identified within the Project Area through a Class III cultural resource survey. The Proposed Action would be designed to avoid significant cultural sites. In addition, non-significant sites would be avoided where possible through project redesign. Overall, impacts to cultural resources are expected to be minimal.
Geology and Mineral Resources	Minimal amounts of material would be removed during the exploration program to provide the data and samples needed to determine the size and shape of the potential ore body. Drill holes would be plugged in compliance with NRS 534.
Soils	Activities causing direct disturbance to soils would include vegetation clearing, excavation, grading, and salvage of growth media. Soil disturbances would slightly impede maturation of soil development, degrade soil structure, and hinder soil biological activity. Additionally, exposed soils would be susceptible to wind and water erosion. Impacts would be limited to the 200 acres of actual disturbance and would be temporary until successful revegetation is attained.
Solid Wastes and Hazardous Materials	No impacts are anticipated with the environmental protection measures planned. Any solid or hazardous waste material would be handled according to state and federal regulations and spills would be clean up and reported as prescribed in the Spills Prevention Plan.
Water (Hydrology and Water Quality)	There are no drinking water resources identified within the Project Area. Impacts to surface water and ground water would be minimized through adherence to the environmental protection measures. Types of impacts to groundwater resources could include aquifer contamination from drilling if drill holes are left open however drill holes would be closed according to NRS 534 immediately following completion.
Visual Resources	Short-term and minor visual impacts would occur from the ground disturbance associated with the Proposed Action until roads have been reclaimed and vegetation has recovered.

Affected Resource	Summary of Potential Impacts
Biological Resources	
Invasive, Non-Native Species	During a recent vegetation survey, no noxious weed species were found growing within the Project Area. Other than cheat grass, very few weedy plant species were encountered in the Project Area. A minor temporary increase in annual invasive and non-native species may occur following land disturbance. Weed control measures would be implemented to minimize the spread of noxious weeds.
Migratory Birds	There would be a short-term loss of potential habitat for migratory birds as a result of vegetation clearance and noise created by the Proposed Action. The loss of potential habitat would be minimal as compared to the surrounding intact habitat. Mitigation measures such as nest surveys by qualified biologists (should activities be planned during the avian breeding season) and buffer zones around active nests would be implemented to reduce this impact to the extent possible.
Riparian Zones	No springs are found within the project area therefore riparian impacts are unlikely to occur on this Project.
Special Status Plant and Wildlife Species	No potential habitat for Federally listed threatened and endangered species occurs in the Project Area. Three Forest Service sensitive species are known to or have the potential to occur in the Project Area. These species are greater sage-grouse, Pygmy rabbit and Northern Goshawk. The Proposed Action would avoid impacts to these species to the extent practicable and appropriate mitigation would be implemented to minimize impacts to these species.
Vegetation	Vegetation would be directly impacted by the proposed drilling activities through vegetation clearance on approximately 200 acres. Following revegetation it is likely that the vegetative composition of the area would be less structurally complex and of a different composition to surrounding area. Impacts would be minimal considering the linear and temporary nature of the disturbance within the otherwise well-established vegetation communities.
Wildlife – General species	Initial field reports indicate that the Project Area (including a three-mile buffer beyond the Project boundary) contains habitat for mule deer and pronghorn antelope among other wildlife species. The Proposed Action would result in direct impacts to wildlife through temporary loss of forage and breeding areas and thermal cover, displacement of individuals to adjacent habitat areas and potential fragmentation of habitat. Due to the dispersive ability of wildlife and small area of disturbance in the context of the wider landscape, the impacts to wildlife are expected to be minor. Mitigation measures would also be implemented to reduce the impact.
Social Resources	
Recreation	Recreational use of the Project Area is light and dispersed. Due to the limited disruption to public access and limited impacts on land use, recreation in the area is unlikely to be substantially affected. Reclamation would be implemented to revegetate` disturbed areas.

Alternatives to Proposed Action

In addition to the Proposed Action, the Forest Service will address the No Action Alternative in the EA. Under the No Action Alternative, new surface disturbance of up to 200 acres for mineral exploration would not be authorized by the Forest Service. However, there would remain the potential for small-scale exploration under future notices (<5.0 acres) which do not require evaluation under NEPA.

Decision Framework

Based on the environmental analysis and disclosure documented in the EA, the District Ranger will decide 1) whether to select the actions proposed or modified, or as described in an alternative; 2) what mitigation measures are needed; and 3) what monitoring is required.

Comment Process

The Forest Service encourages your comments on this proposal, along with supporting reasons that the responsible official should consider in reaching a decision. Only those who provide comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision. Your comments will help us prepare the EA. If there is no potential for significant impacts, that finding, along with the EA and the District Ranger's decision, will be sent to those who commented. If the EA indicates the potential for significant impacts, the District Ranger would initiate additional environmental documentation prior to a decision.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the Elko Free Press. Interest expressed or comments provided on this EA after the close of the 30-day comment period will be considered, but will not confer eligibility to appeal a decision to proceed with the Project. Comments must meet the criteria established in 36 CFR 215.6.

Comments must be submitted to: District Ranger, Mountain City Ranger District, 2035 Last Chance Road, Elko, Nevada 89091; or fax (775) 778-6167. The office business hours for those submitting comments in person are: 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc) to comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-mtncity@fs.fed.us. Comments must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments.

Names and addresses of those who comment on the EA will become part of the administrative record of this NEPA review and will be available for release to a third-party upon request under authority of the Freedom of Information Act.

Appeal Eligibility

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the information identified in 36 CFR 215, including:

- Name and Address;
- Title of the proposed action;
- Specific comments (36 CFR 215.2) on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision;

- Signature or other verification of identity upon request; identification of the individual or organization who authored the comments(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility;
- For multiple names or multiple organizations, a signature must be provided for the individual authorized to represent each organization, or for each individual that wishes to have appeal eligibility, and
- Individual members of organizations must submit their own comments to meet the requirements of appeal eligibility as an individual, comments received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this Project and will be available for public inspection and will be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

Contact

For further information contact Manuel Silva, Project Lead at (775) 778-6129 or email at mrsilva@fs.fed.us.

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