

USDA



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Humboldt-Toiyabe
National Forest

March 2014

**SCOPING AND NOTICE OF
PROPOSED ACTION
AND OPPORTUNITY TO
COMMENT**

**WOOD GULCH MINERAL
EXPLORATION PROJECT**

**MOUNTAIN CITY RANGER DISTRICT
ELKO COUNTY, NEVADA**

USDA NONDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

INTRODUCTION

The Mountain City Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is preparing an Environmental Assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) on Western Exploration LLC's (Western) Wood Gulch Mineral Exploration Project, Elko County, Nevada. This document serves as Scoping and Notice of Proposed Action and provides an opportunity to comment on the specifics of the Project. The Project is subject to the Pre-decisional Administrative Review Process under 36 CFR §218. The Wood Gulch Project Plan of Operations can be reviewed at the Mountain City Ranger District Office during normal business hours. Further information is also available from Douglas Powell, Geologist and Project Lead, at (775) 778-6129.

The initial Scoping and Notice of Proposed Action for the Wood Gulch Project occurred in July 2011. This process is being reinitiated because the size of the Project Area has been increased from 3,252 acres to 4,800 acres.

DECISION FRAMEWORK

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

PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of and need for the Proposed Action is to identify, locate, and delineate mineral deposits, specifically by exploration drilling on National Forest System (NFS) lands within the Wood Gulch Project Area. The statutory right of Western to explore for mineral resources on federally administered lands is recognized in the General Mining Law of 1872, and is consistent with the Humboldt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan of 1986 (IV-51). Mineral exploration and mining has and continues to be a vital part of the economy of northern Nevada.

LOCATION

The Project is located north of the Independence Mountains and east of the Bull Run Mountains in northern Elko County, approximately 70 miles north of Elko, Nevada. The Project is located on NFS lands administered by the United States Forest Service (USFS) in Sections 12-14, 23-26, 35 and 36, Township 44 North, Range 53 East (T44N, R53E), and in Sections 7, 18, 19 and 30, Township 44 North, Range 54 East (T44N, R54E), Mount Diablo Base and Meridian, Elko County, Nevada (Figure 1).

PROPOSED ACTION SUMMARY

Western plans to conduct mineral exploration activities in the project area in a phased manner over a period of ten years. Exploration activities would include the temporary construction of exploration roads and drill sites, reconstruction of previously reclaimed roads, maintenance of existing roads, and the utilization of overland travel routes. Drill holes are estimated to range in depth from 200 to 3,000 feet with the majority of drill holes being less than 1,500 feet deep. Exploration activities are estimated to disturb approximately 100 surface acres within a 4,800 acre Project Area.

Western is proposing 21 drill holes during their first Phase activities, resulting in approximately ten acres of associated surface disturbance. Phase-1 activities would include the use of existing roads, construction of new exploration roads, drill sites and sumps, and the utilization of overland travel routes and laydown areas. Subsequent phases would consist of similar activities totaling approximately 90 acres of surface disturbance. Western estimates 30 acres of drill pad disturbance and 70 acres of road disturbance over the ten years project period. Detailed location of surface disturbance for subsequent phases cannot be specified at this time because the locations of future activities would be based on results from the previous phased activities.

Reclamation techniques would include concurrent reclamation to minimize the total project disturbance at any one time. Reclamation would consist of recontouring to the approximate original contours and reseeding with a USFS approved certified weed-free seed mix. It is anticipated that final reclamation would be completed within three years of project completion.

ISSUES

Based on USFS experience with exploratory drilling, initial concerns for this proposed project include:

- Impacts on wildlife species and habitat.
- Impacts on sensitive plant species.
- Impacts on riparian areas, water quality, aquatic systems and fish.
- Impacts to other National Forest System land users, including, but not limited to, livestock permittees and recreationists.
- Impacts to heritage resources.

In addressing these issues, specialist reports will be prepared for wildlife, botany, hydrology, geohydrology, and cultural resources. All identified issues will be analyzed in the Environmental Assessment.

ALTERNATIVES

Currently, two alternatives have been identified to be analyzed in detail with further analysis potentially generating other alternatives.

The No Action Alternative: The Plan of Operations would not be approved and Western would not conduct exploration activities. Conditions at the Project Area would remain as they are now.

The Proposed Action Alternative: Western's Plan of Operations would be approved and Western would be authorized to conduct the proposed exploration project with up to 100 acres of surface disturbance. This alternative would include the proposed activities outlined in the Plan of Operations from Western and would include environmental protection measures, timing, monitoring, reclamation, and protective resource measures based upon comments from the public, tribes, and the interdisciplinary team during analysis of the Proposed Action.

COMMENTS WELCOME

The USFS is now seeking public comments specific to the proposed Project. There are two purposes for this comment period:

1. To provide opportunity for public participation prior to a decision by the Responsible Official. In addition, submission of comments during this period is required to establish objection eligibility subject to *36 CFR 218.5 and 218.7 subparts (a) and (b)*; and
2. To meet the NEPA requirements for public scoping.

The Project is not authorized under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act; however, the Project is implemented under land management plans and is subject to 36 CFR 218.7 subparts (a) and (b). Instead of an appeal period, there is an objection process before the final decision is made and after the final environmental analysis document and draft decision are mailed (reference 36 CFR 218). In order to be eligible to file an objection, specific written comments related to the Project must be submitted during the Notice of Proposed Action (NOPA) and Opportunity to Comment period.

In development and preparation of the Project, the participation of interested persons, state and local governments, and Native American tribes is encouraged at this time and throughout the process.

How to Comment and Timeframe

Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to object must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B.

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Only those who submit timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project during a public comment period established by the responsible official are eligible to file an objection under §218.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the *Elko Daily Free Press*. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or time frame information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Written comments must be submitted to the Responsible Official for this project (Wendy Fuell, District Ranger, Mountain City Ranger District) at 2035 Last Chance Road, Elko, Nevada 89801; fax number (775) 778-6167; or you may hand-deliver your comments during normal business hours from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays to 2035 Last Chance Road, Elko, Nevada. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to this email address: comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-mtn-city@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for objection eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

For objection eligibility each individual or representative from each entity submitting timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request.

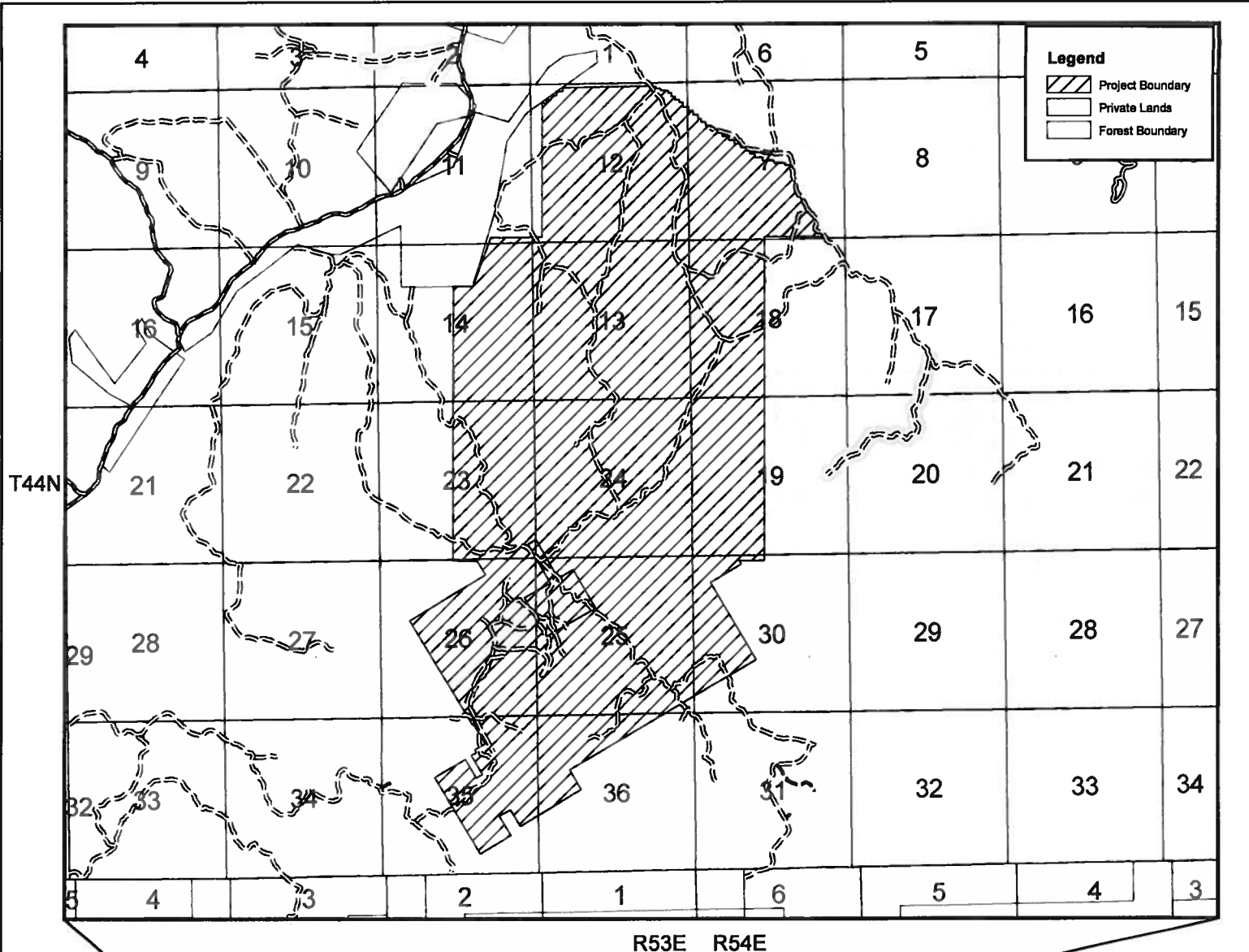
Additional Information

The opportunity to comment ends 30 days following the date of publication of this legal notice in the *Elko Daily Free Press* (Newspaper of Record).




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.

For more information on the NEPA process or this Project please contact Wendy Fuell, District Ranger at (775) 738-5171 or Douglas Powell, Geologist and Project Lead, at (775) 778-6129.

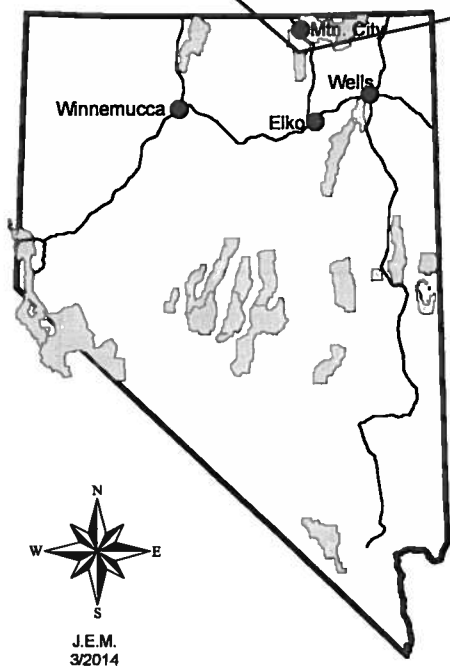
Attachments: Figure 1 – Project Location Map



Legend

-  Project Boundary
-  Private Lands
-  Forest Boundary

**Western Exploration's Wood Gulch Project
 Mountain City Ranger District
 Humboldt - Toiyabe National Forest
 Location Map**



This GIS product was compiled from various sources and may be corrected, updated, modified, or replaced at any time. For more information contact: Elko Zone Office, Elko, Nevada (775) 738-5171.