



SCOPING DOCUMENT

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Porter Canyon Exploration Project

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Austin Ranger District

Lander County, Nevada

June 2014

Comments Welcome

The Austin Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is initiating scoping and welcomes comments on the proposed Porter Canyon Exploration Project (Project), which is located on National Forest System lands within the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. The project proponent (Tatmar Ventures (US) Inc.) proposes to conduct mineral exploration on the west side of the Toiyabe Range in southern Lander County.

The District has tentatively determined that this proposed activity may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) [36 CFR 220]. A proposed action may be categorically excluded only if there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action and the proposed action is within a category listed in section 31.12 or 32.2 of FSH 1909.15. This proposed action falls within section 32.2(8) –

(8) Short-term (1 year or less) mineral, energy, or geophysical investigations and their incidental support activities that may require cross-country travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than 1 mile of low standard road, or use and minor repair of existing roads (36 CFR 220.6(e)(8)).

In developing the Project, the Forest Service encourages the participation of interested persons, businesses, state and local governments, and Native American tribes at this time and throughout the process prior to the decision by the Responsible Official. The Project Plan of Operations can be reviewed at the Austin Ranger District during normal business hours and on the project web page (see How to Comment).

Background

The Austin Ranger District received a Plan of Operations (POO #03-13-02) in October 2013 from Enviroscientists, Inc. proposing an exploration drilling project in the Big Creek Mining District. The Big Creek District is known for antimony, gold, silver, and barite (Tingley, 1988, Mining Districts of Nevada: NBMG Report 47). Silver was discovered in Big Creek Canyon in 1863 but no significant production ensued. In 1891, stibnite was recognized in some of the silver prospects and antimony production continued until 1898. Antimony was also discovered in Dry Canyon and near the crest of the Toiyabe Range at the Antimony King mine. The antimony mines were re-opened in 1916-1918 when prices were high because of the war. There was also sporadic production in 1935-1969 (Tingley and Smith, 1982, NBMG, Open-File Report 83-3). Antimony and gold exploration in the area in the 1970s and 1980s eventually led to opening of the Inspiration Mine, or Austin Gold Venture, in 1986 on the west side of Birch Creek. Austin Gold Venture produced approximately 175,000 ounces of gold before closing in 1989. Additional geological information about the Project can be found at <http://www.highway50gold.com/s/home.asp>.

Analysis Area

The Project is located on the Austin Ranger District approximately 7 miles southwest of Austin, Nevada. Exploration activities would occur in sections 22 and 27 of Township 18 North, Range 43 East (Mt. Diablo Meridian). The Project lies on the alluvial fan at the western foot of the Toiyabe Range (Fig. 1) immediately north of the reclaimed mill site and tailings impoundment of the Austin Gold Venture. The surface slopes gently to the west at elevations of 6,100 to 6,400 feet. The nearest drainages are ephemeral and there are no springs nearby.

In the 1960s, the area was seeded with crested wheatgrass and that remains the dominant vegetation (Fig. 2). Other grasses and forbs are present but very little sagebrush. Rabbitbrush is abundant on the tailings impoundment but sparse elsewhere. One proposed drill site is within a mixed sagebrush – pinyon/juniper area and two are on the margins of a sagebrush area that was not treated in the 1960s.

The Project is located in what Nevada Division of Wildlife has mapped as greater sage grouse Habitat of Moderate Importance, or PGH, but no leks are known to occur within 4 miles of the Project.

Purpose and Need for Action

The agency's need is to respond to the proponent's submittal of a Plan of Operations (POO) and to ensure operations will be conducted so as to minimize adverse environmental impacts on National Forest surface resources (36 CFR 228.8, Subpart A) where feasible. The purpose of this proposed action is to authorize mineral exploration activities consistent with the statutory right of the proponent to explore for and develop mineral resources on federally-administered lands under the General Mining Law of 1872 and with other laws and regulations. The decision for the Forest Service to make is whether to approve the POO as submitted or to approve it with additional measures to protect surface resources. The proponent's need is to determine if economically viable mineral deposits exist within the proposed project area, and to define the nature, extent, shape, and economic value of such deposits.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is for the Forest Service to authorize Tatmar Ventures (US), Inc. (Tatmar) to conduct mineral exploration by drilling boreholes at the proposed sites. The project is expected to start in 2014 and would have a duration of one year, except that final reclamation seeding may occur more than one year after project startup if necessary to maximize the chances of revegetation success.

Approval of the POO would authorize Tatmar to drill boreholes to collect subsurface samples for resource evaluation at up to 17 drill pads. More than one borehole may be drilled from the same pad. The gentle slopes and grass-dominated vegetation are well suited to cross-country travel with minimal impact so the drill pads would be accessed by overland travel routes totaling approximately 11,200 feet. The total acreage of 17 drill pads is about 1 acre and that of the overland travel routes is about 2.5 acres. Drill pads would be reclaimed and damage to overland travel routes, if any, would be repaired by scarifying and seeding.

Reverse circulation methods would be used to drill boreholes to planned depths averaging 1,600 feet. The boreholes would penetrate several hundred feet of alluvial fan material before reaching the bedrock to be sampled. Up to two drills may be operating at the same time. Drills would probably be operated continuously for 24 hours per day, seven days per week. Each would be attended by a pipe truck, water truck, booster truck, and auxiliary compressor. Other large equipment that would be needed include a Cat D6 (or equivalent) dozer and a backhoe.

Drill pads would be about 40 feet by 60 feet and would include two sumps to contain all drilling fluids. Each drill pad would be constructed to provide an approximately level surface for the drill and associated equipment. No laydown or staging areas are planned for Forest Service-managed lands but could be located on adjacent BLM-managed lands.

Upon completion of drilling, the boreholes would be plugged and abandoned so as to protect ground water. All abandonment material would be placed by tremie pipe (or drill string) from the bottom of the hole upward to fill the hole even if the bottom of the hole is above the water table. A cement surface seal of at least 20 feet would cap settled or set-up abandonment material as required by Nevada Code NAC 534.420(6) or 534.4371(2)b. Zones of lost circulation or of different water quality or hydraulic head would be sealed by neat cement in confining zones above and below to prevent the vertical movement of water (NAC 534.4371(7)). Boreholes would be plugged before the drill moves to the next hole.

For reclamation, sumps would be allowed to dry and then would be backfilled with excavated material and covered with stockpiled soil. Drill pads would be recontoured. Where necessary, overland travel routes would be repaired or scarified. Disturbed areas would be raked and seeded with a Forest Service-approved native seed mix. A portion of the reclamation bond would be held for at least three growing seasons to ensure successful revegetation and control of noxious weeds.

Specific measures designed to minimize adverse environmental impacts currently include, but are not limited to, the following:

- All equipment would be washed prior to entering the area to prevent the introduction of noxious weed seeds.
- Cultural resources identified during a survey of the project area would be avoided by Project activities. None of the identified sites is within 200 feet of a proposed drill site.
- If undiscovered archaeological or cultural resources are encountered during Project work, activity in that area would cease immediately, the Forest Service would be notified, and the resources would be evaluated. The results of the evaluation would determine subsequent action.
- Ground disturbing activities from May 1st to July 15th would be avoided to protect nesting migratory birds or a nest survey would be conducted prior to disturbance and sites of nesting activity would be avoided.
- Sumps would have escape ramps for wildlife and livestock.

Mineral exploration in the proposed project area conforms to the Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan of 1986, particularly the following Standards and Guidelines for Minerals:

1- Encourage exploration and development of mineral resources and minimizing possible adverse impacts to surface resource.

4 – Require operating plans which minimize impacts to surface and cultural resources and provide for reclamation of disturbed areas. (p. IV-57)

23 - Reasonable access for mineral exploration, development, and production is guaranteed under the mining laws. The type of access approved will be consistent with the logical development of mineral properties. (p. IV-59)

The proposed action also conforms to Direction for Management of Management Area 8 - Toiyabe:

Livestock grazing and development of minerals will be done in a manner that protects key dispersed recreation, wildlife, and fisheries resources. (p. IV-124)

How to Comment

Written comments, concerns, or suggestions for this Project should be mailed to Steve Williams, District Ranger, Austin District, P.O. Box 130, Austin, NV 89310; or sent by facsimile to (775) 964-1451; or hand delivered to 100 Midas Canyon Road, Austin, NV, during normal business hours of 8:00 am to 12:00 pm and 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. Oral comments should be provided during normal business hours via telephone (775-964-2671), in person, or at an official agency function (i.e. public meeting) that is designed to elicit public comments.

To provide electronic comments, copy the following web address into your browser's address bar: <http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/fs-usda-pop.php?project=44564> and click on "Comment on Project" in the list of links on the right side of the web page that opens. To submit electronic comments after the period for the comment web form ends on July 7, 2014, you should email your comments to the project contact as given under "Request More Info" on the project web page. Please use the term "Porter Canyon 03-13-02" in the subject line of your email.

Copies of all comments submitted, including names and addresses, may be made available to the public. Comments will typically be posted in the "Public Reading Room" on the project web page unless they contain offensive language or meet other criteria for exclusion.

To be most effective, comments should be received by the Forest Service no later than **July 7, 2014**.

Contact Information

For further information on this Project, visit the project web page at <http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/fs-usda-pop.php?project=44564>, or contact George Langstaff (775-964-2671, gdlangstaff@fs.fed.us). The project web page can also be accessed by first going to the Forest's home page at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/htnf/>, clicking on "NEPA Projects" in the Quick Links on the right side of the web page, and then scrolling down to the project link. We thank you for your interest in our National Forests.



STEVEN WILLIAMS
Austin District Ranger

6/5/2014
Date

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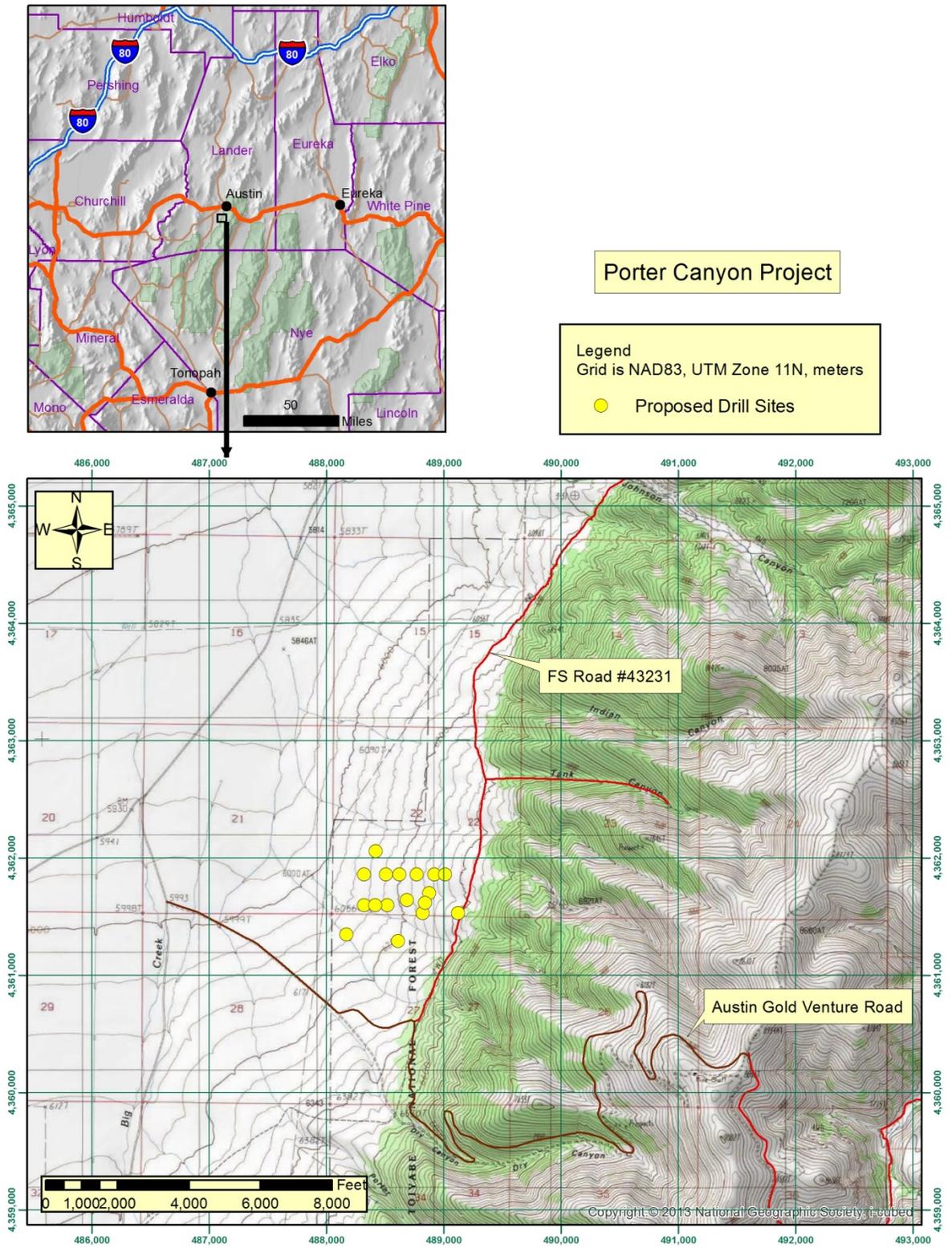


Figure 1. Porter Canyon Project – Location Map

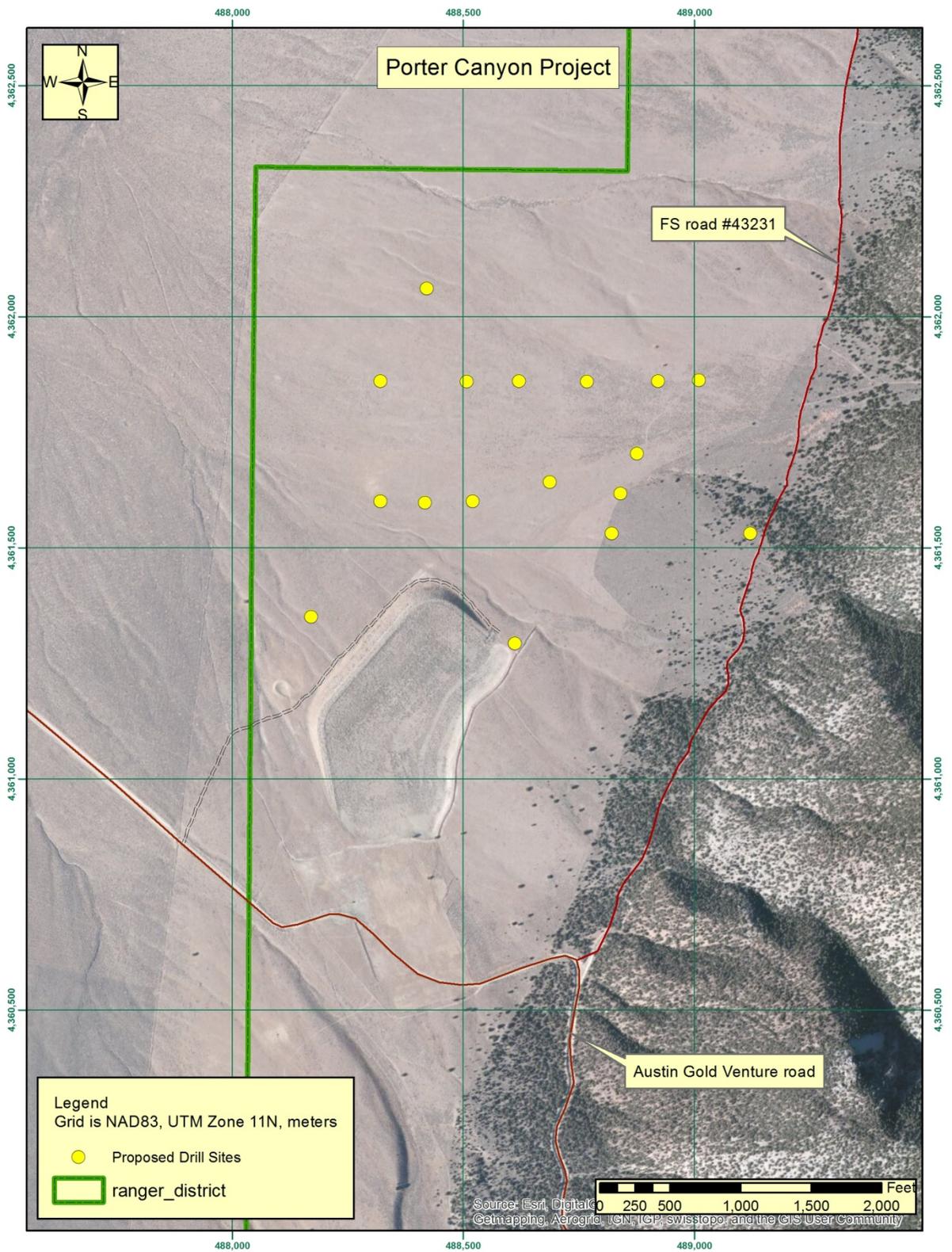


Figure 2. Porter Canyon Project – Proposed Drill Sites.