



SCOPING DOCUMENT

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

DAP Exploration Project

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Austin Ranger District

Lander County, Nevada

March 2015

Comments Welcome

The Austin Ranger District is initiating scoping and welcomes comments on the proposed DAP Exploration Project (Project), which is located on National Forest System lands within the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. The project proponent is Gaylen Cropper. He proposes to conduct mineral exploration drilling on the east 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 meets the criteria of 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)).

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

Background

The Austin Ranger District received a Plan of Operations (POO #03-14-01) in December 2014 proposing a gold exploration drilling project in the Birch Creek Mining District (Tingley, 1988, Mining Districts of Nevada: Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology Report 47). The Birch Creek District has produced small quantities of gold, silver, lead, tungsten, and uranium (Tingley, J. and Smith, P., 1982, Mineral inventory of the Eureka-Shoshone resource area: Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology, Open-File Report 83-3). On the Simpson Park 7.5-minute topographic quadrangle, the DAP project is near the Cahill gold mine and the Lowboy uranium mine.

Analysis Area

The Project is located approximately 8.5 miles southeast of Austin, Nevada. Exploration activities would occur in section 25 of Township 18 North, Range 44 East (Mt. Diablo Meridian). The Project lies in the bedrock foothills of the Toiyabe Range about 2 miles south of US Highway 50 (Fig. 1). The rolling hills are incised by relatively narrow drainages and elevations range from 6,300 to 6,700 feet. The nearest drainages are ephemeral and the perennial Birch Creek is about 1.5 miles to the southwest. Goodyear Spring is about 1 mile to the northwest.

The area has sparse pinyon-juniper woodland with sagebrush dominating the sunnier slopes. The rocky soil supports only minor grasses and forbs in the understory.

The Project is located in what Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) has mapped as low value/ transitional habitat for greater sage grouse. Essential/ irreplaceable habitat occurs on alluvial fans of Big Smoky Valley about 1,500 feet southeast of the project. A lek has been reported 2.5 miles south of the nearest proposed drill site. NDOW comments on the 2010 Lowboy drilling project suggest the area is likely winter habitat for mule deer, the valley to the east likely has pronghorn, and there is a potential for bighorn sheep to move into the area. Kit fox has been reported north of the project. Previous biological surveys in the area did not detect any federally listed species or any Forest Service Region 4 Sensitive Species although suitable habitat is present for some.

Purpose and Need for Action

The Forest Service'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 Mr. Cropper to conduct mineral exploration by drilling three boreholes. The project is expected to start in 2016 and would have 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 Mr. Cropper to drill boreholes to collect subsurface samples for resource evaluation at 3 drill pads. Each drill pad would have an area of approximately 2,000 square feet, including a sump. Sumps would be large enough to contain all drilling fluids and cuttings and would have escape ramps to prevent entrapment of wildlife. Existing roads provide access to the proposed sites. It is anticipated that about 100 feet of an existing road would need to be repaired. Forest Service Road #43253 would be temporarily blocked during the drilling of one hole but a detour is available for other Forest users. Drilling supplies would be staged at a laydown area of approximately 100 feet by 100 feet. The total acreage that could be disturbed, including existing roads at each drill site, is about 0.4 acres. New soil disturbance would be limited to the sumps and would have a much smaller area.

Reverse-circulation or coring methods would be used to drill 3.5-6-inch diameter boreholes to planned depths averaging 1,000 feet. It is expected that one reverse-circulation drill operating 12 hours per day or one core drill operating 24 hours per day would complete the project in about 30 days. The drill would be supported by a pipe truck, water truck, booster truck, auxiliary compressor, and, if needed, light plant with generator. A backhoe would be used to construct the sumps. Water for drilling would be obtained from the Birch Creek Ranch.

Upon completion of drilling, the boreholes would be plugged and abandoned so as to protect ground water. 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. If present, 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 as needed to return to pre-existing conditions 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 the 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.

- A cultural resources survey will be conducted by the Forest Service prior to project authorization. Any sites determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places would be avoided by Project activities.
- 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.
- A biological survey will be conducted by the Forest Service prior to project authorization. Negative impacts to federally listed species, critical habitat of federally listed species, or Forest Service Region 4 Sensitive Species would be avoided or mitigated.
- 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.

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 Ranger 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.

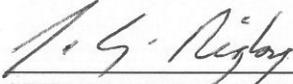
To provide electronic comments, copy the following web address into your browser's address bar: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=46405> and click on "Comment on Project" in the list of links on the right side of the web page that opens. To submit electronic comments after the period for the comment web form ends on April 24, 2015, you should email your comments to the project contact as given under "Request More Info" on the project web page. Please use the term "DAP Project 03-14-01" 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 **April 24, 2015**.

Contact Information

For further information on this Project, visit the project web page at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=46405>, 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.

for 

STEVEN WILLIAMS
District Ranger

20 March 2015

Date

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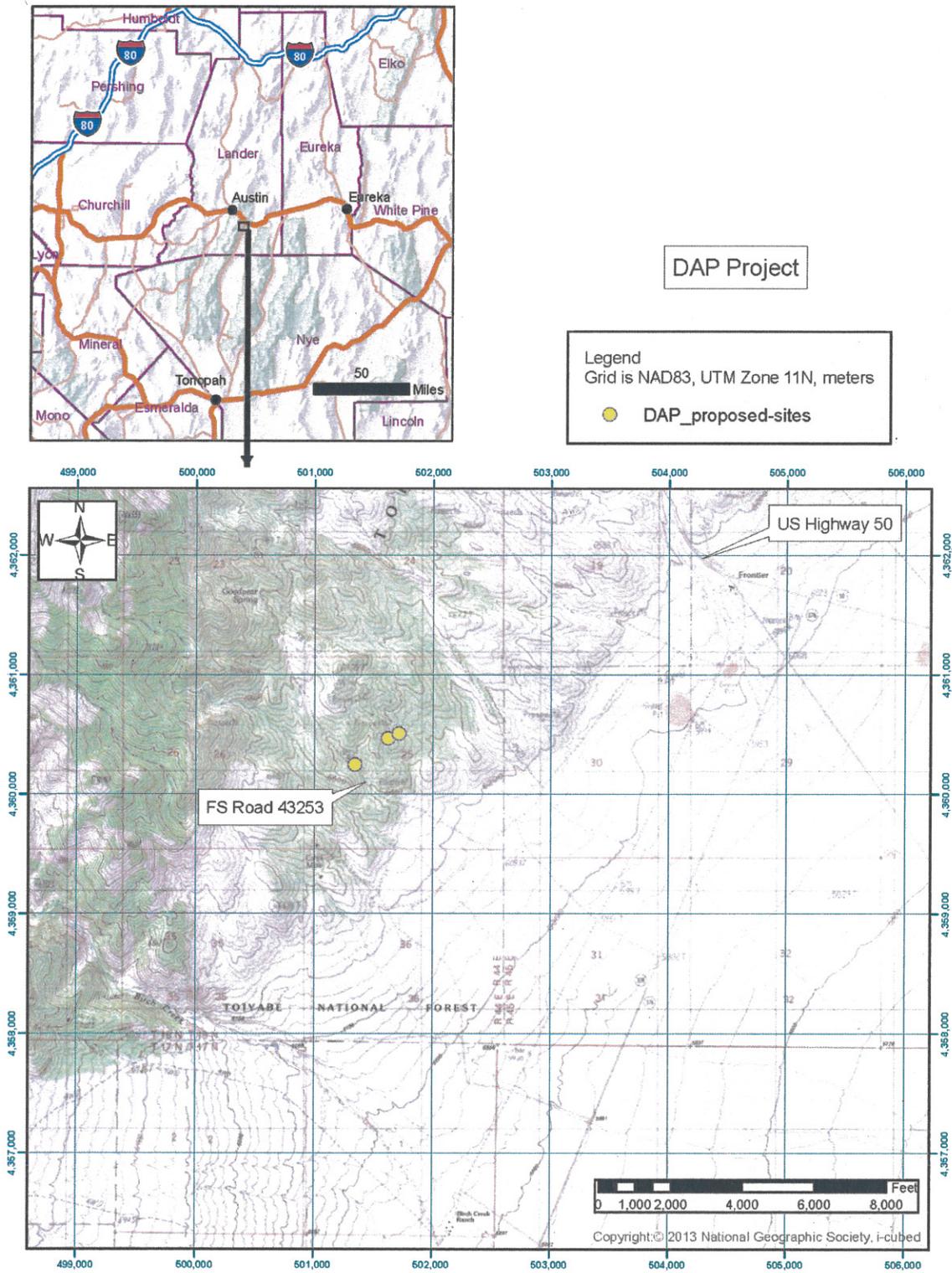


Figure 1. DAP Project – Location Map