



SCOPING DOCUMENT

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Buffalo-Everson Exploration Project

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Austin Ranger District

Nye County, Nevada

March 2016

Comments Welcome

The Austin Ranger District is initiating scoping and welcomes comments on the proposed Buffalo-Everson Exploration Project (Project) for federally owned locatable minerals on National Forest System lands within the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. The project proponent is Renaissance Exploration, Inc., a subsidiary of Renaissance Gold, Inc. The proponent proposes to conduct mineral exploration drilling on the west side of the Shoshone Range in northern Nye County, near Berlin-Ichthyosaur State Park.

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 #03-15-01) in June 2015 proposing a gold exploration drilling project (6/23/15 news release by Renaissance Gold, Inc., at www.rengold.com) in the Union mining district (Tingley, 1988, Mining Districts of Nevada: Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology Report 47). The Union district covers the area surrounding the mining towns of Ione, Berlin, and Grantsville and is mostly on National Forest System lands. It has had intermittent production of gold, silver, lead, and mercury since its discovery in 1863. Copper, zinc, antimony, and tungsten occurrences have also been reported in the district (Kral, V.E., 1951, Mineral Resources of Nye County, Nevada: University of Nevada Bulletin, Geology and Mining Series No. 50, 223 p.) Barite and fluorite have been produced more recently. The Good Luck Mine exploited gold- and base-metal sulfide-bearing quartz veins just south of the Project (Hamilton, M. M., 1993, Mines, Prospects, and Mineral Occurrences in that part of the Shoshone Range, Nevada, Administered as Toiyabe National Forest: U.S. Bureau of Mines, Mineral Land Assessment, Open-File Report 16-93, 198 p., 5 plates). The area was previously drilled by Santa Fe Pacific Gold in 1995 (POO #03-94-009) and by Nevada Pacific Gold in 2005 (POO #03-04-002).

Analysis Area

The Project is located approximately 17.5 miles east of Gabbs, Nevada, on the Ione 7.5-minute topographic quadrangle. Exploration activities would occur in sections 16 and 21 of Township 12 North, Range 39 East (Mt. Diablo Meridian). The Project lies at the western foot of the Shoshone Range (Fig. 1) among steep hills incised by relatively narrow drainages. Elevations range from 6,500 to 7,000 feet. The drainages in the area are ephemeral. The nearest perennial surface water is in the Reese River on the opposite side of the Shoshone Range. The spring at the mouth of West Union Canyon is 1.6 miles to the south and Knickerbocker Spring is about 1 mile to the northeast. An intense local storm in July 2015 caused scouring in the small canyons and debris flows on the adjacent alluvial fans.

A 2015 field survey by Enviroscientists, Inc., which was hired by Renaissance Gold, indicates the project area is dominated by pinyon-juniper woodland but has patches of xeric mixed sagebrush shrubland on the ridges and areas of big sagebrush shrubland on the alluvial fans to the west. The September 2015 management area maps that accompany the U.S. Forest Service Greater Sage-grouse Record of Decision for Nevada and the Toiyabe National Forest Forest Plan Amendments show that 2 of the drill sites and approximately 450 feet of new temporary road are in an Other Habitat Management Area and the rest of the proposed disturbance is in a non-habitat management area. No special status plant species were found in the project area.

Enviroscientists' biologists observed pinyon jays and various other migratory bird species in and near the project area and found mule deer (a Toiyabe National Forest Management Indicator Species) sign throughout the project area. An occupied golden eagle nest was found about 0.3 miles from the project area. Townsend's western big-eared bats (a Region 4 Sensitive Species) and other bats were identified using acoustic detectors located near mine workings approximately 0.25 miles from the nearest drill site. No signs of sage grouse, pygmy rabbits, or northern goshawks were found in the project area.

A 450-acres Class III cultural resources survey was completed in 1994 prior to the first drilling project in the area. Enviroscientists, Inc. was contracted by Renaissance Gold to conduct a new 131.5-acres Class III block survey of the project area. Project activities will avoid all sites that are determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and all sites that remain unevaluated.

The Project will not disturb paleontological resources like those in Berlin-Ichthyosaur State Park. Rocks in the Project area belong to the Pablo Canyon Formation of Permian age. This formation is dominantly coarse- to fine-grained sedimentary rocks from volcanic sources and andesitic flows and breccias and is unlikely to contain fossils. Ichthyosaur fossils in the state park occur only in younger (Triassic) marine sedimentary rocks of the Luning Formation (Silberling, N.J., 1959, Upper Triassic Paleontology of the Union District, Shoshone Mountains, Nevada: U. S. Geological Survey, Professional Paper 322, 67 p.).

Purpose and Need for Action

The Forest Service's need is to respond to the proponent's submittal of a Plan of Operations and to ensure operations will be conducted so as to minimize adverse environmental impacts on National Forest surface resources where feasible (36 CFR 228.8, Subpart A). 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 Act 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 reasonable 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 Renaissance Exploration to conduct mineral exploration by drilling up to three boreholes at each of 15 sites. The project is expected to start in 2016 and would have a duration of one year, including reclamation.

Approval of the POO would authorize Renaissance Exploration to drill boreholes at 15 drill pads to collect subsurface samples for resource evaluation. Each drill pad would have an area of approximately 2,400 square feet (0.06 acres). Sumps would be dug at each site and would be large enough to contain all drilling fluids and cuttings. They would have escape ramps to prevent entrapment of wildlife. Existing roads provide access across lands managed by the BLM from the Gabbs - Ione road to the Project area. Within the Project area, existing roads and up to 4,670 feet of new temporary roads would be used to reach individual drill sites. 2,440 feet of the proposed new temporary roads are reclaimed drill roads. Some parts of the new temporary roads may be used without new construction. Drilling supplies would be staged at a laydown area of approximately 60 feet by 150 feet (0.21 acres), which would be adjacent to one of the drill sites. The total acreage that would be disturbed, including the laydown area and non-constructed roads, is about 2.6 acres. Disturbance would be greater if the average actual constructed road width is greater than 14 feet.

Boreholes would be drilled to planned depths of 500-1,500 feet using either a track-mounted reverse-circulation drill or a track-mounted core drill. It is expected that each drill would operate 24 hours per day, 7 days per week with 2 crews of 3 persons each and one geologist. The core and reverse-circulation drills may or may not be on site at the same time. The Project would be completed within one year but the actual duration of drilling would depend on depths and how many boreholes are drilled at each site as well as on any difficulties encountered in drilling. 15 relatively shallow holes could be completed in as little as 10 weeks. Each drill would be supported by a pipe truck, water truck, booster truck, auxiliary compressor, and light plant with generator. An excavator, backhoe, and/or dozer would be used to construct the roads, sumps, and drill pads. Water for drilling would be obtained from a private well in Ione that is permitted for mining, milling, and domestic purposes (Certificate No. 14629).

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)). Each borehole 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, if any. Constructed drill pads and new temporary roads would be recontoured 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 has been completed. Any sites determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places or that remain unevaluated 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 has been completed but has not yet been fully analyzed. Negative impacts to federally listed species, critical habitat of federally listed species, and Forest Service Region 4 Sensitive Species would be avoided. If impacts could not be avoided or adequately mitigated, an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared.

- Ground disturbing activities from May 1st to July 1st 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 7 – Paradise-Shoshone:

Exploration and development of key mineral resources will be conducted in a manner that minimizes effects on range, wildlife, cultural resources, and recreation values. (p. IV-120).

The proposed action conforms to the Desired Conditions, Objectives, Guidelines, and Standards of the September 2015 Greater Sage Grouse Record of Decision for Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Utah and Land Management Plan Amendments, Attachment B – Greater Sage Grouse Nevada Plan Amendment.

How to Comment

Written comments, concerns, or suggestions for this Project should be mailed to Erik Taylor, 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 (e.g., public meeting) that is designed to elicit public comments.

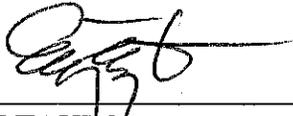
To provide electronic comments, copy the following web address into your browser's address bar: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=47640> and click on "Comment on Project" in the list of links on the right side of the web page that opens. To submit electronic comments after the period for the comment web form ends on April 8, 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 "Buffalo-Everson Project 03-15-01" 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.

Although comments will be accepted until a decision is made, comments should be received by the Forest Service no later than **April 8, 2015** to be most effective. As a result of legislation signed in 2014, decisions on categorically excluded projects can no longer be appealed.

Contact Information

For further information on this Project, visit the project web page at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=47640>, 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.



ERIK TAYLOR
District Ranger

3/7/16

Date

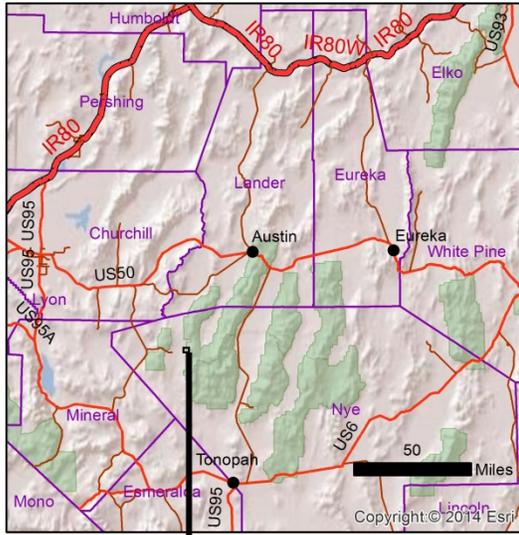
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(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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Buffalo-Everson Project

Legend
Grid is NAD83, UTM Zone 11N, meters

- Laydown
- + Proposed Drill Sites
- Road Repair
- Existing Roads
- Proposed New Roads

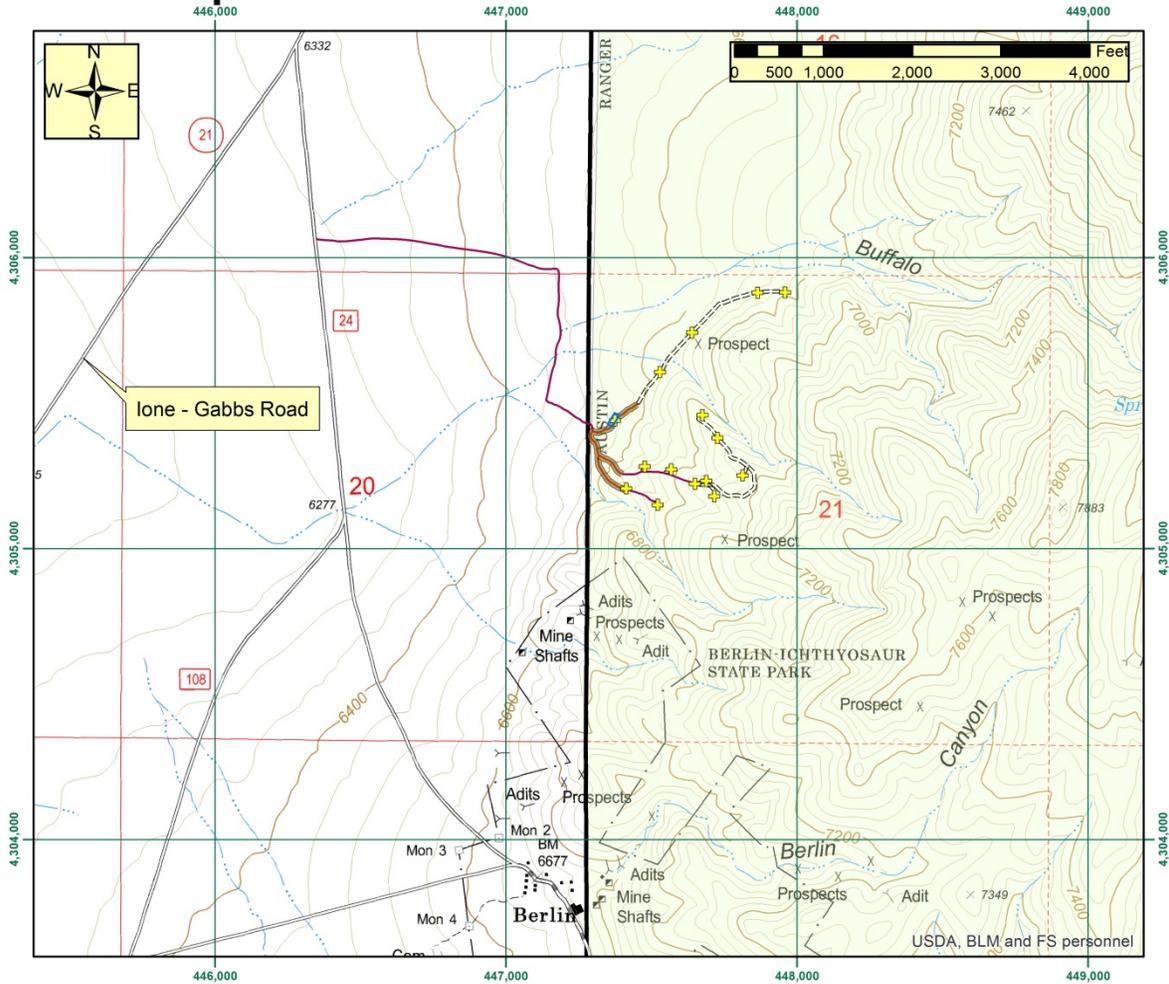


Figure 1. Buffalo-Everson Project – Location Map