



# SCOPING DOCUMENT

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest Service

## Golden Brew Exploration Project

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest  
Austin Ranger District

Lander County, Nevada

April 2016

### Comments Welcome

The Austin Ranger District is initiating scoping and welcomes comments on the proposed Golden Brew Exploration Project (Project) for federally owned locatable minerals on National Forest System lands within the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. The project proponent is Highway 50 Gold (US) Corp. The proponent proposes to conduct mineral exploration drilling on the west side of the Toiyabe Range in Lander County.

The District has tentatively determined 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 (POO) 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 #03-15-02) in June 2015 proposing a gold exploration drilling project just north of the Washington mining district (Tingley, 1988, Mining Districts of Nevada: Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology Report 47). The Washington district is mostly on National Forest System lands and is known for silver, lead, zinc, antimony, tungsten, and arsenic. Minor quantities of silver and lead were shipped from Washington and San Juan Canyons in 1918-1919 and 1948, respectively (Kral, V.E., 1951, Mineral Resources of Nye County, Nevada: University of Nevada Bulletin, Geology and Mining Series No. 50, p. 207). Meridian Minerals Company carried out a trenching and sampling project in bedrock immediately east of the project area in the late 1980s. Highway 50 Gold believes the mineralized bedrock found by Meridian extends into the project area under alluvial cover and a four-hole project on BLM lands west of the project area in 2011 confirmed that interpretation (for additional information go to [www.highway50gold.com](http://www.highway50gold.com)).

## Analysis Area

The Project is located approximately 20 miles southwest of Austin, Nevada, on the Brewer Canyon 7.5-minute topographic quadrangle. Exploration activities would occur in sections 23 and 26 of Township 16 North, Range 42 East (Mt. Diablo Meridian). The Project lies on the alluvial fan at the base of the Toiyabe Range (Fig. 1). Elevations range from 6,600 to 7,200 feet. The drainages in the area are ephemeral. The nearest surface water is an intermittent reach of Reese River, about 3.2 miles to the northwest. A small spring was observed in Brewer Canyon near the eastern boundary of the project area during the 2014 biological survey.

The project area is in the transition from pinyon-juniper woodland on steep west-facing slopes of the Toiyabe Range to sagebrush shrubland on the more gentle alluvial fan slopes. Sparse trees are present over much of the project area.

The Project straddles the boundary between priority (PHMA) and general (GHMA) sage grouse habitat management areas according to shape files prepared for the September 2015 Greater Sage-Grouse Record of Decision for Idaho and Southwest Montana, Nevada and Utah and Land Management Plan Amendments (NVCA ARMPA GRSB Habitat at

<http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/>

[en/prog/more\\_programs/geographic\\_sciences/gis/geospatial\\_data.html](http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/prog/more_programs/geographic_sciences/gis/geospatial_data.html)) with one of the proposed drill sites in PHMA. According to the January 2015 Golden Brew Exploration Project, Lander County, Nevada, 2014 Baseline Biological Survey Report prepared by Enviroscientists, Inc., two proposed sites are within pinyon-juniper woodland, one is in xeric mixed sagebrush shrubland, and one is on the boundary (Fig. 6 of the report). There is an active lek 1.6 miles west of the nearest proposed drill site.

Most of the project area and 3 of the 4 proposed drill sites are in the Toiyabe Range Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA). All of the proposed overland travel of 5,120 feet and new road construction of 515 feet will be within the IRA. The proposed project disturbance of 1.5 acres within the IRA constitutes 0.0015% of the 100,397 acres of the Toiyabe Range IRA.

## **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 Highway 50 Gold to conduct mineral exploration by drilling up to 3 boreholes at each of 4 proposed 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 Highway 50 Gold to drill boreholes at 4 drill pads to collect subsurface rock samples for resource evaluation. Each drill pad would have an area of approximately 2,400 square feet. Sumps would be dug at each site and would be large enough to contain all drilling fluids and cuttings. Existing roads provide access across private lands and lands managed by the BLM from the Reese River Road to the Project area. Within the Project area, existing roads and approximately 5,120 feet of overland travel would be used to reach individual drill sites. Approximately 515 feet of new temporary road construction would be needed to connect overland travel routes above and below a short slope. The total estimated surface disturbance, including overland travel, is about 1.6 acres.

All of the proposed overland travel and new temporary road and 3 of the 4 drill pads would be within the IRA. Surface disturbance within the IRA would be 1.5 acres. Access to one drill site would require clearing 20-50 pinyon or juniper trees from a route approximately 725 feet long. Where feasible, trees would be limbed rather than cut. Due to the gentle topography, road construction would not be needed on this route. Cut limbs and trees would be scattered on the ground to decay naturally.

Reverse-circulation methods would be used to drill boreholes to average depths of about 2,000 feet. It is expected that one or two drills would operate 24 hours per day, 7 days per week with 2 crews of 3 persons and one geologist for each drill. The Project would be completed in a year but the actual duration of drilling would depend on how many boreholes are drilled at each site and their depths and on any difficulties encountered during drilling. The first four boreholes could be completed in 8 weeks. Each drill would be supported by a pipe truck, water truck, booster truck, auxiliary air compressor, and light plant with generator. An excavator, backhoe, and/or dozer would be used to construct the roads, drill pads, and sumps. Water for drilling would be obtained from the town of Austin.

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)). If artesian conditions are encountered, boreholes would be plugged in accordance with NAC 534.4375. 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, if any. Drill pads and new temporary roads would be recontoured and seeded with a Forest Service-approved native seed mix.

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 block cultural resources survey of the project area has been completed. 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 block biological survey of the project area has been completed. Negative impacts to federally listed species, critical habitat of federally listed species, and Forest Service Region 4 Sensitive Species would be avoided to the extent feasible. If impacts are uncertain or cannot be adequately mitigated, an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared.
- Sumps will have animal escape ramps.
- Surface disturbing activities from May 1st to June 30th 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.
- Surface disturbing activities from March 1st to June 30th would be avoided to protect breeding or nesting sage grouse that may be in the vicinity.
- Motorized over-snow vehicles would not be used during the period November 1st to February 28th to protect wintering sage grouse that may be in the vicinity.
- Any trash or food items that may attract animals will be kept in vehicles or in spill-proof containers to ensure such items are inaccessible.

Mineral exploration in the proposed project area conforms to the Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan of 1986 (as amended), particularly the following Standards and Guidelines for Minerals and Greater Sage-Grouse:

*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)*

*GRSG-GEN-ST-006-Standard – Do not authorize new surface disturbing and disruptive activities that create noise at 10dB above ambient measured at the perimeter of an occupied lek during lekking (March 1 to May 15) from 6 pm to 9 am. Do not include noise resulting from human activities that have been authorized and initiated within the past 10 years in the ambient baseline measurement.*

*GRSG-GEN-GL-007-Guideline – During breeding and nesting (March 1 to June 30), surface disturbing and disruptive activities to nesting birds should be avoided.*

*GRSG-RT-ST-079-Standard – In priority and general habitat management areas and sagebrush focal areas, do not conduct or allow new road or trail construction (does not apply to realignments for resource protection) except when necessary for administrative access to existing and authorized uses, public safety, or to access valid existing rights. If necessary to construct new roads and trails for one of these purposes, construct them to the minimum standard, length, and number and avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts.*

*GRSG-RT-ST-080-Standard – Do not construct or allow road and trail maintenance activities within 2 miles from the perimeter of active leks during lekking (March 1 to May 15) from 6 pm to 9 am.*

*GRSG-P-DC-116-Desired Condition – Anthropogenic uses on public lands are managed to reduce the effects of predation on greater sage-grouse.*

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

*Standard #8 under Forest-wide mineral standards and guidelines will be emphasized in areas identified as having highly sensitive resource values; e.g. Murphy-Porter, Bunker Hill, and Toiyabe Crest. (p. IV-127).*

*8 – The following “Access and Reclamation Measures” will be encouraged for mineral exploration . . .*

- A. Close or obliterate access unless identified to become part of the transportation system after mineral activity is complete.*
- B. Minimize need for road construction through the use of specialized exploration equipment.*
- C. Develop access to a standard necessary to minimize resource impacts and to facilitate reclamation. . .*
- D. Where new road and drill pad construction is essential for exploration access, such roads and other disturbed areas will generally be closed and stabilized by revegetation and recontouring where necessary to restore site productivity, to protect or restore visual quality, and to minimize resource conflicts.*
- E. Identify and save topsoil needed for reclamation prior to disturbance. (p. IV-57-58).*

## How to Comment

Written comments, concerns, or suggestions for this Project should be mailed to Erik D. 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 (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=48096> 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, please do so before June 20, 2016. You should email your comments to the project contact as given under "Request More Info" on the project web page. Please use the term "Golden Brew Project 03-15-02" 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 **June 20, 2016**.

## Contact Information

For further information on this Project, visit the project web page at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=48096>, or contact Jim Rigby (775-482-7887, [jrigby@fs.fed.us](mailto:jrigby@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.



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ERIK D. TAYLOR  
District Ranger

5/18/16  
Date

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- (1) Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
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- (2) Fax: (202) 690-7442; or*
- (3) Email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).*

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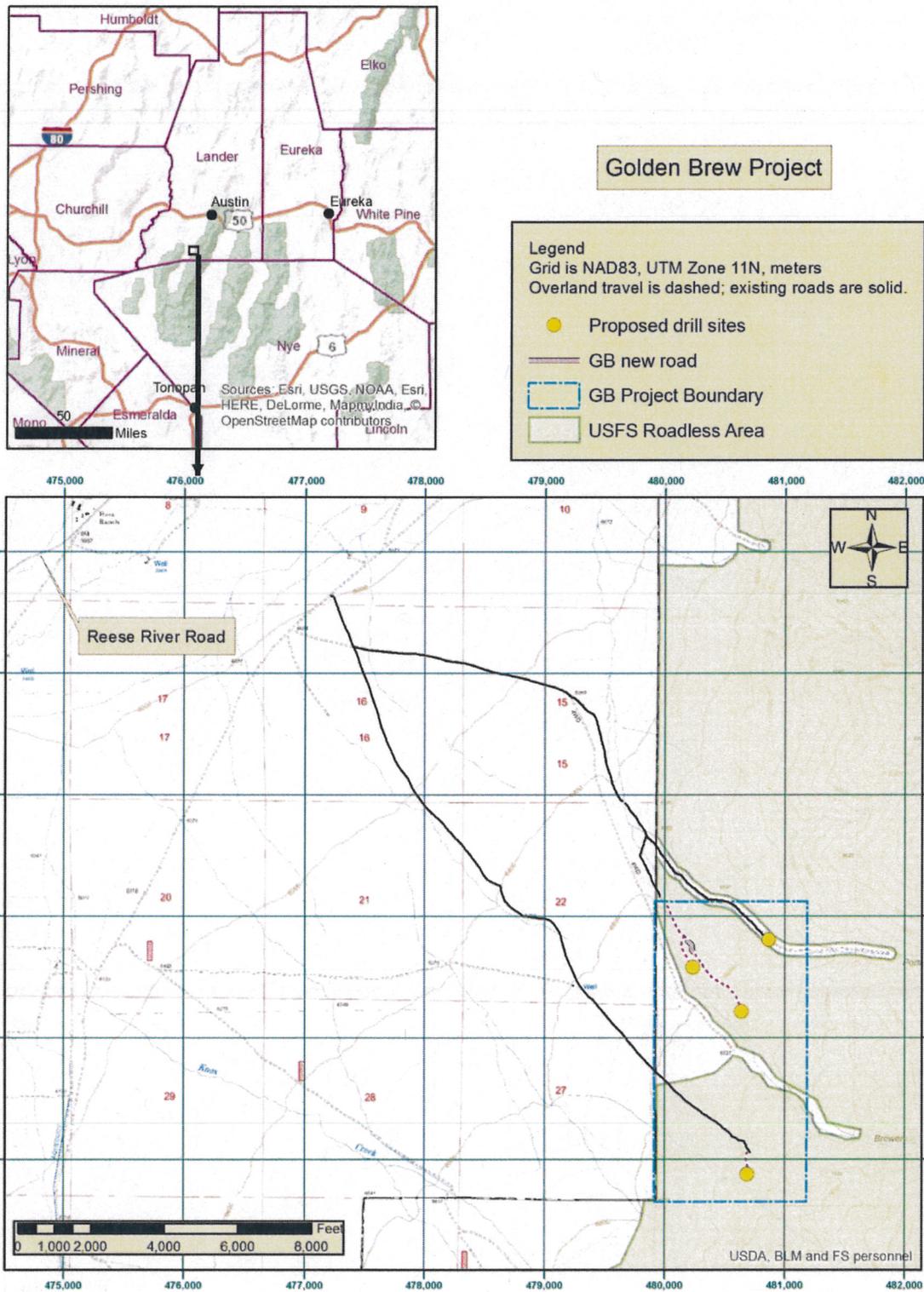


Figure 1. Golden Brew Project – Location Map