SCOPING AND NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION AND OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT

NATIONAL EXPLORATION PROJECT

SANTA ROSA RANGER DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION
The Santa Rosa Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for National Gold Mining Corporation’s (NGMC) National Exploration Project administered by the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Santa Rosa Ranger District (FS), Bureau of Land Management Humboldt River Field Office (BLM), and private land in Humboldt County, Nevada. The BLM is a cooperating agency for this analysis.

This notice serves as the invitation to provide scoping comments as provided for under the NEPA at 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1500, and notification of opportunity to comment as provided for under the FS’ administrative review regulations at 36 CFR 218.24. This project is not authorized under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA), however, it is subject to the Pre-decisional Administrative Review Process under 36 CFR 218 Subparts (A) and (B). The Project Plans of Operations can be reviewed at the Santa Rosa Ranger District Office during normal business hours.

DECISION FRAMEWORK
This Project proposal will be analyzed in an EA as required by the NEPA and FS policy. Two separate decisions written by the FS and the BLM will be issued for the EA. Based on the environmental analysis and disclosure documented in the EA, the Responsible Officials 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 FS’ purpose is to authorize locatable 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 including the Humboldt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan of 1986 (IV 50) (USFS 1986). The agency’s need is to respond to the proponent’s submittal of a Plan of Operations (Plan) and to ensure operations would be conducted so as to reasonably minimize adverse environmental impacts on National Forest System (NFS) surface resources (36 CFR 228.8, Subpart A) where feasible. The proponent’s purpose and need is to explore for and develop known mineral deposits within the proposed Project Area in order to support the U.S. economy and bring to market needed commodities.

The BLM’s need for the action is established under Section 302 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) and the BLM Surface Management Regulations found at 43 CFR 3809, to respond to an exploration plan of operations and to take actions as necessary to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation of the public lands.

LOCATION
NGMC proposes to conduct locatable mineral exploration activities on the National Exploration Project within the National Mining District, south of Eightmile Creek and north of Threemile Creek, Humboldt County, Nevada, on NFS managed land, BLM managed public land, and private land. Activities are proposed in Sections 3 and 4, Township 45 North, Range 39 East (T45N, R39E) and Sections 27, 28, 33, and 34, Township 46 North, Range 39 East (T46N, R39E), Mount Diablo Base and Meridian (Project Area– Figure 1).

PROPOSED PROJECT OVERVIEW AND ACTION SUMMARY
NGMC proposes to conduct up to 200 acres of surface disturbance related to mineral exploration activities in the project area in a phased manner over a period of ten years. Of this total proposed surface disturbance, up to 110 acres would be conducted on private land, up to 50 acres on BLM managed public
land, and up to 40 acres on NFS lands. NGMC is currently acknowledged to conduct 3.45 acres of surface disturbance within the Project Area under BLM Notice NVN-094924 and could amend it to the allowable maximum of five acres. NGMC would not exceed the allowable acknowledged surface disturbance under the Notice.

Approximately 31.8 acres of the Project Area on NFS land is within the South Fork Quinn Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA). Total activity within the IRA includes approximately 4,648 feet of road construction and approximately 20 acres of drill sites/sump construction. On NFS lands, where practical, methods to restrict the public to the IRA to prevent unnecessary public access on the temporary exploration roads would be utilized.

Exploration activities would include the following under this Project: a) drilling reverse circulation (RC) and core holes; b) geologic mapping and geophysical surveys; c) construction of exploration roads, drill sites, and cuttings sumps; d) excavation of geotechnical test pits and trenching; e) the installation and operation of groundwater monitoring and piezometric wells; f) installation of a meteorological station to collect baseline data; g) the maintenance of all roads within the Project Area including access roads; and h) reclamation of Project-related surface disturbance. Project activities would be implemented using the appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) established by the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP), BMPs for Water Quality Management on NFS lands, BLM, and the Nevada Division of Conservation Districts, Handbook of Best Management Practices (NDEP 1994), adopted by the State Environmental Commission December 7, 1994. NGMC would conduct year-round exploration drilling activities, as weather permits, with up to two track- or truck-mounted RC drill rigs, and up to two track- or truck mounted core drill rigs. Drill holes would be vertical or angled to an average depth of 1,500 feet with a maximum depth of 2,250 feet.

Daily water requirements would depend on the type of drill and the number of drills active at any time. NGMC proposes to use up to 76,000 gallons of water per day. Water would be used for drilling fluids and would be obtained from a well NGMC has developed on private land in Section 33 of the Project Area. Phase I of the Project could potentially have as many as two RC and two core rigs.

NGMC is proposing approximately 138 drill pads and approximately 20 miles of road construction during Phase I activities, resulting in approximately 74 acres of surface disturbance. Detailed locations 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. NGMC would copy the USFS, BLM, and NDEP Bureau of Mining Regulation and Reclamation (BMRR) on correspondence regarding proposed Project activities in subsequent phases in the form of Work Plans, with specific locations of planned exploration activities for environmental review and approval prior to commencing exploration.

**RECLAMATION**

Drill holes would be plugged in accordance with Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) 534, NAC 534.4369 and NAC 534.4371, and guidance from the USFS, BLM, and/or NDEP BMRR. In the event groundwater is encountered, drill holes would be plugged pursuant to NAC 534.420. Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420 on BLM-managed public lands, according to the approved Plan of Operations on NFS lands, and NAC 519A on all lands. Reclamation would meet the reclamation objectives as outlined in the United States Department of Interior Solid Minerals Reclamation Handbook #H 3042-1 (BLM 1992), Surface Management Handbook H-3809-1 (BLM 2012), and revegetation success standards per NDEP/BLM “Nevada Guidelines for Successful Revegetation for the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S.D.A. Forest Service” (BLM 1999). NGMC disturbance would be recontoured and reseeded.
ALTERNATIVES
Currently, two alternatives have been identified to be analyzed in detail.

The Proposed Action Alternative: NGMC’s Plans of Operation with the FS and BLM would be approved and NGMC would be authorized to conduct the proposed exploration project. This alternative would include the proposed activities outlined in the Plans of Operation from NGMC and could include additional environmental protection measures, timing restrictions, monitoring, reclamation, and protective resource measures based upon environmental analysis and comments from the public, tribes, and the interdisciplinary team during analysis of the Proposed Action.

The No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, on BLM-managed public land, NGMC could continue their Notice-level exploration activities under Notice NVN-094924 for up to five acres of surface disturbance and accessible portions of private land exploration activities as approved by the NDEP BMRR. Additionally, the Road Maintenance Agreement (FS 7700-41) on the main access road from U.S. Highway 95 to the Project Area would remain in place between the FS and NGMC. No disturbance would occur on NFS land.

In addressing project issues, specialist reports will be prepared for wildlife, hydrology, geohydrology, and cultural resources. All identified issues will be analyzed in the EA.

SOLICITATION OF COMMENTS, COMMENT PROCESS, AND TIME FRAME FOR SUBMISSION OF COMMENTS

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

- 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 subparts (a) and (b); and

- To meet the NEPA requirements for public scoping.

In order to be eligible to file an objection, specific written comments related to the Project must be submitted during the Scoping and Notice of Proposed Action (SNOPA) and Opportunity to Comment period.

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 Humboldt Sun (Newspaper of Record). 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 timeframe information provided by any other source.

Written comments must be submitted to the Responsible Official for this project (District Ranger, Santa Rosa Ranger District, 3275 Fountain Way, Winnemucca, NV, 89445). Office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays.

E-mail comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, pdf, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc or .docx) to comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-santarosa@fs.fed.us. Please put “National Exploration” in the subject line.
Electronic comments can also be submitted using the project webpage at: https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=55914. To submit comments using the web form, select “Comment/Object on Project” under “Get Connected” on the right panel of the project’s webpage.

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.

The opportunity to comment ends 30 days following the date of publication for the legal notice for this project in the Humboldt Sun (Newspaper of Record). 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 timeframe information provided by any other source. 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 36 CFR 218.

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 released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information on the NEPA process or this Project please contact the Acting Santa Rosa District Ranger at 775-623-5025, or Jenna Padilla, Zone Geologist and Project Lead, at jenna.padilla@usda.gov or 775-778-6129.

Attachment: Figure 1 – Project Location Map