



**File Code:** 2800

**Date:** February 8, 2017

Dear Interested Party,

New Vulcan Hill Project LLC has requested to conduct an exploratory drilling project for locatable minerals on lands administered by the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF). The Forest Service (FS) is obligated to process, administer and manage mining operations on National Forest System lands conducted under the authorities of the following laws and regulations: the U.S. Mining Laws of May 10, 1872 (17 Stat. 91 as amended 30 U.S.C. 31-54), the Organic Administration Act of 1897 (30 Stat. 34 as amended 16 U.S.C. 473-478, 419-482 and 551), and Public Law 91-631, entitled the Mining and Minerals Policy Act of 1970. The laws established a statutory right to go upon and use the open public domain land of the National Forest System (NFS). Regulations promulgated on September 1, 1974, enacted 36 CFR 228 Subpart A - Locatable Minerals. The regulations set forth rules and procedures for mining related activity on NFS land to minimize adverse environmental impacts on NFS surface resources. The FS has worked closely with the operator to obtain a Plan that provides the necessary detail to analyze the proposal as directed under 36 CFR 228, Subpart A.

#### **Proposed Project Description**

The project area is located within the Lakeview 7.5 minute topographic quadrangle within the Sand Creek-Lake Pend Oreille watershed. The drilling sites are located in: Township 54 North, Range 1 West, Section 35, Boise Meridian (B.M.), Bonner County, Idaho and Township 53 North Range 1 West Section 2, Boise Meridian (B.M.), Bonner County, Idaho. The operation area is accessed from the Bunco Road, Forest Road (FR) 332, FR 278, and FR 278H. Access control will be accomplished by way of appropriate signage and temporary road closures. Travel will commence via 4-wheel-drive vehicles and foot traffic as conditions/travel regulations permit. All drilling, and necessary exploration equipment, will be trucked to the drilling area via a lowboy, or trailer, on existing open travel routes.

The company has proposed 7 drill sites for locatable mineral exploration. The drill rig will run two, eight-hour shifts per day. There will be 1-8 people in the exploration area depending on the specific activities being carried out; numbers will vary depending upon the current stage of the exploration program. Water withdrawal will occur from a state permitted location on Falls Creek and will ensure mitigations provided by the Fisheries and Hydrologic Reports are implemented.

The company intends to drill 7, 2.54 inch holes to approximate depths of 600 feet on the 7 proposed sites. The drill rig will utilize a recirculating fluid recycling system, and storage for the drilling equipment in addition to collection of drill cuttings. Only natural bentonite and organic polymers will be utilized in the drilling fluids. Upon completion of the drilling operation, drill cuttings will be removed and disposed of in compliance with the State of Idaho and Federal Regulations, and drill water will be pumped back into a water truck and reused at the next site or disposed of in compliance with State and Federal regulations. The drill holes will be abandoned



as per Idaho Administrative Procedure Act Title 37.03.09 Department of Water Resources drill hole abandonment regulations.

A list of supplies and equipment onsite includes: the drill rig, rod sloop or wheeled rod trailer, a light plant, and a commercial fluids management system. A water truck and other similar support vehicles are expected at drilling sites. A water truck will be present for dust and fire suppression, if necessary. There will be no permanent structures constructed, only temporary structures, possibly including a camp trailer.

All lands disturbed during the activities in this proposal would be reclaimed and disturbed areas and topsoil stockpiles would be stabilized using erosion and sediment control devices and would be seeded with the FS approved seed mix, where appropriate.

If this exploration is successful in revealing mineralization of sufficient value, the company intends to submit another Plan for additional exploration and potential development of the discovery. This possible future proposal would be subject to documentation as appropriate under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and would require a new decision.

### **Documentation**

I have made a preliminary assessment that this proposal falls within a category of actions established by the Chief of the Forest Service that do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment and, therefore, may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. The proposal falls within criteria set forth in the 36 CFR 220.6 (e)(8) - "...short term mineral, energy, or geophysical investigations and their incidental support activities that may require cross-country travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than one mile of low standard road (service level D, Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 7709.56), or use and minor repair of existing roads..."

Resource conditions that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances related to a proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are:

- (1) Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species;

### **Wildlife:**

**Threatened and Endangered:** There is a "No Effect" determination on federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitats, as supported by the Biological Assessment.

**Sensitive:** There is a "May Impact Individuals or Habitat, but will not likely result in a trend toward Federal listing or loss of viability to the population or species" determination on the following sensitive species: Gray Wolf and the Western Toad, as supported by Biological Evaluation.

**Fisheries:**

**Threatened and Endangered:** The project will have a “No Effect” determination on bull trout and Kootenai River white sturgeon, as supported by the Biological Assessment.

**Sensitive:** The project will have a “No Impact” determination on any listed sensitive species, as supported by the Biological Evaluation.

**Botany:**

**Threatened and Endangered:** The project will have a “No Effect” determination on any listed threatened or endangered plants, as supported by the Biological Assessment.

**Sensitive:** The project will have a “No Impact” on Wet Forest, Deciduous Riparian, Subalpine, Cold Forest, Peatland, and aquatic sensitive plant guilds. The project will have a “May Impact Individuals or Habitat, but will not likely result in a trend toward federal listing or reduced viability for the population or species” for Moist and Dry Forest sensitive plant guilds, as supported by the Biological Evaluation.

- (2) Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds;  
Project area does not contain any of the aforementioned areas of concern.
- (3) Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas;  
Project area does not contain any of the aforementioned areas of concern.
- (4) Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas;  
Project area does not contain any roadless or potential wilderness areas.
- (5) Research natural areas (RNA);  
RNAs are not present in the project area.
- (6) American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites, and  
No religious or cultural sites are within the area of potential effect.
- (7) Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.  
One historic property within the area of potential effect has a “No ‘adverse effect’” determination as per 36 CFR 800 to the historic property through design criteria.

The mere presence of one or more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion (CE). It is the existence of a cause-effect relationship between a proposed action and the potential effect on these resource conditions and if such a relationship exists, the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determine whether extraordinary circumstances exist. (36 CFR 220.6(b))

### Your Comments

This notice provides an opportunity for those interested in or affected by this project to comment and make their concerns known. Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the postmark on this letter or email sent date. Written comments may be mailed or hand-delivered to our Supervisors Office, 3815 Schreiber Way, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, 83815. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 7:45 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays.

Electronic comments must be submitted to:

[comments-northern-idpanhandle-sandpoint@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-northern-idpanhandle-sandpoint@fs.fed.us)

Acceptable formats for electronic comments are text or html e-mail, Adobe portable document format (pdf), and formats viewable in Microsoft Office applications. Please enter the project name (**Vulcan Hill Exploratory Drill**) on the subject line. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names, addresses, email addresses, and telephone numbers of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection. Any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality. When the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address. For more information, please contact Josh Sadler (Mineral Administrator/Geologist) at the IPNF Forest Supervisor's Office, 3815 Schreiber Way, Coeur d'Alene, ID 83815; (208)765-7206; or by email at [tjsadler@fs.fed.us](mailto:tjsadler@fs.fed.us)

Sincerely,



ERICK J. WALKER  
District Ranger

# Vulcan Hill Exploratory Drill



