

## Quick Check

The following guidelines will help you determine which activities require approval, permits, and/or fees.

### Activities not requiring a permit:

- Recreational gold panning and prospecting with hand tools
- Collecting rocks and minerals (less than 25 lbs.) for personal use
- Collecting invertebrate (e.g., shells) and plant fossils for personal use

### Activities requiring a Special Use Permit or an

#### Approved Plan of Operations:

- Commercial or institutional collecting of rocks and minerals
- Collecting quantities of rock greater than 25 lbs. for personal use may be permitted with a Free Use Permit
- Mechanized prospecting and mining

### Activities prohibited:

- Collecting vertebrate fossils
- Collecting mineral specimens from an active claim
- Collecting archeological artifacts
- Collecting at developed recreation sites

## Other Considerations...

Motorized vehicle travel is restricted to designated routes, and may be seasonally restricted. Pick up a copy of the Travel Map before heading out.

This brochure provides only summary information on collecting. For more detailed information, please contact the Custer National Forest directly.

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## Geology Trivia

**Q:** What is the difference between a rock and a mineral?

**A:** A mineral is an inorganic, naturally-occurring crystalline solid with a well-defined chemical composition. A rock is made of many minerals.

**Q:** The Custer National Forest is home to the Stillwater Complex, America's only source of what?

**A:** Platinum Group Elements (platinum, palladium, rhodium, iridium, ruthenium, osmium)

**Q:** The highest point in Montana is found on the Beartooth Ranger District. Can you name it?

**A:** Granite Peak (12,799 ft)

**Q:** What fossil is also an important energy source?

**A:** Coal

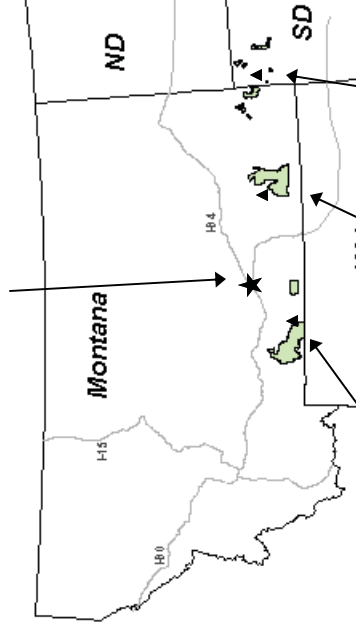


United States Department of Agriculture  
Forest Service  
Custer National Forest

# Minerals, Rocks, and Fossils on the Custer National Forest

Prospecting and Collecting  
On National Forest System Lands

Custer National Forest Supervisor's Office  
1310 Main Street  
Billings, MT 59105  
Phone: 406-657-6200  
[www.fs.fed.us/r1/custer](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/custer)

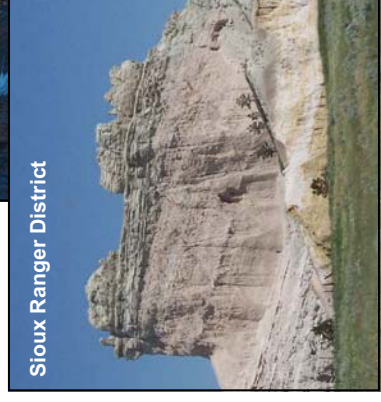
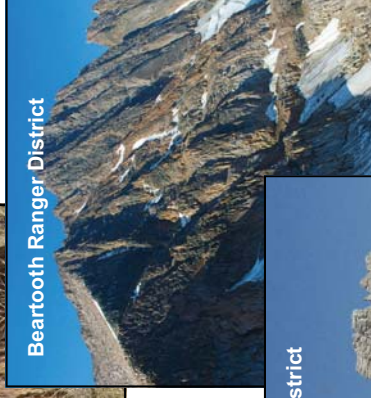


Beartooth Ranger District  
6811 US Hwy 212 South  
Red Lodge, MT 59068  
Phone: 406-446-2103

Ashland Ranger District  
PO Box 168  
Ashland, MT 59003  
Phone: 406-784-2344

Sioux Ranger District  
PO Box 37  
Camp Crook, SD 57724  
Phone: 605-797-4432

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## Minerals & Geology Management

The U.S. Forest Service is a Multiple-Use agency and manages mineral and geology resources in accordance with Federal laws and regulations. Prospecting and recreational collection of rocks, mineral specimens, and certain fossils are generally allowed on National Forest System lands.

Before you begin any adventure on public land, you should ask yourself a few questions:

- Will I be on public land?**
- Are there any restrictions there?**
- Are there any active mining claims there?**
- Will my activity involve mechanized equipment or explosives?**
- Will I need a permit?**

## Maps

Custer National Forest visitor maps and travel maps are available at all Forest offices.

Topographic and geologic maps are also useful in determining possible geologic areas of interest.

Geologic maps of the Custer National Forest are available from three primary sources:

- U.S. Geological Survey
- Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology
- South Dakota Geologic Survey

## Petrified Wood (36 CFR 228c)

While technically a plant fossil, petrified wood is treated like a mineral material, the same category as landscape rock and gravel. An individual may remove, without charge, 25 lbs of petrified wood per person per day, not to exceed 250 lbs per year. Petrified wood is found primarily on the Ashland Ranger District.

## Prospecting (36 CFR 228a)

Prospecting is the search for surface exposure of minerals. It usually consists of mapping and sampling. Collecting hand samples of soil and rock is allowed without a Plan of Operations, as long as no motorized equipment is used. The use of metal detectors, radiation counters, and other passive systems that do not cause surface disturbance fall within this category.

You do not need a mining claim to prospect. A mining claim protects your discovery, and therefore is usually staked after one has found a mineral deposit. Mineral exploration on someone else's claim is trespassing. If you are unsure about your prospecting activities, talk to the Minerals Coordinator at the Supervisor's Office or District Office.

## Abandoned Mines (16 U.S.C. 473-475)

There are many abandoned mines found on the Custer National Forest. The best advice on abandoned mines is this:

 **STAY OUT and STAY ALIVE** 

Abandoned mines may look harmless but they can be one of the most dangerous things on the Forest. Unstable openings, rotting timbers, old explosives, flooded shafts, and mine gases are just some of the hazards that can be found around old mines.

There are old coal mines on the Ashland Ranger District. These workings are not extensive, but are very susceptible to cave-ins.

Some caves and their surrounding areas have been closed by Administrative Order to protect the public from elevated radiation and to facilitate area reclamation. Several mines in the North and South Cave Hills units on the Sioux Ranger District and in the Pryor Mountains on the Beartooth Ranger District are currently undergoing cleanup of uranium. Please avoid these areas.

## Landscape Rock & Gravel (36 CFR 228c)

The use of aggregate (sand and gravel) and landscaping rock from Forest Service land is a discretionary action permitted by District Rangers in those areas where appropriate. Free-use permits may be issued for non-commercial purposes, not to exceed 5,000 cu. yds. per year. Those seeking aggregate or rock for commercial purposes or in greater volumes must apply for a Mineral Material Sale through the District Office.

## Fossils (36 CFR 251.51, 251.53, 261.2, 261.9(i))

Fossils are evidence of past life, preserved in sedimentary rocks. Vertebrate fossils may NOT be collected for personal or commercial use on public land. Anything with a backbone or a spinal column falls into this category. Other "non-significant" fossils, such as coral, plant casts, mollusks, and insects, are available for collection. Please assist in the management of your National Forest by reporting the location of vertebrate fossil finds (a photo and coordinates, lat-long or UTM, are best).

## Caves (36 CFR 290)

Caves are natural cavities large enough for a person to enter. Most caves are found in carbonate rocks like limestone, and are formed by water dissolving the calcium carbonate. Most Custer National Forest caves are found in the Beartooth Ranger District's Pryor Mountains. Unless otherwise posted, you may enter and explore caves at your own risk. Cave visitors are responsible for their own safety and should take precautions to learn safety procedures and utilize proper equipment.

Caves may pose special dangers to visitors due to hazards that may require special skills and equipment. In addition to the physical hazards of falling rock, pits, and tight passages, some of these caves have naturally occurring uranium deposits and high levels of radon gas. Limiting your exposure to both uranium minerals and radon is advised.

Big Ice Cave in the Pryor Mountains has been partially developed to allow visitors easier access. Walking beyond the cave platform is not recommended. Do NOT remove or damage formations in any cave.