



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Medicine Bow -Routt
National Forests and Thunder
Basin National Grassland

Laramie Ranger District
2468 Jackson Street
Laramie, WY 82070-6535
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/mbr>

File Code: 1950-1/2810

Date: April 11, 2006

RE: RMP Resources Corporation
Muddy Mountain Core Drilling Project

Dear Interested Party:

The Laramie District of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests is seeking comments on a Plan of Operation for Mineral Exploration via core drilling. RMP Resources Corporation is planning to obtain core samples from eleven (11) drill site locations on unpatented mining claims in the Lake Mountain and Muddy Mountain areas. The proposed drill sites for RMP Resources Corporation are at least one (1) mile away from Albany, Wyoming and at least 1½ miles away from the Lake Owen Recreation Area.

United States Mining Laws (Act of May 10, 1872; 30 U.S.C. 21-54) grant a statutory right to enter upon public lands to search for minerals. Consequently, the Forest Service has no authority to prohibit or deny proposals that are reasonably necessary to conduct mineral exploration and/or development at unpatented mining claims. We do, however, have the authority to reasonably regulate mining activities to minimize adverse environmental effects on National Forest resources. We also have the authority to ensure compliance with applicable environmental laws. Therefore, we will complete an environmental analysis to determine the impacts associated with the proposed mining activities and to determine mitigation measures needed to protect National Forest resources and improvements from impacts associated with mineral activity.

If Plans of Operation for additional Mineral Exploration proposals are submitted, a separate Environmental Analysis, with public scoping, will follow the receipt of that Plan of Operation.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of the action is to respond to the Plan of Operations for Mineral Exploration submitted by RMP Resources Corporation.

The need for the action is to determine how the surface use connected with operations authorized by the United States Mining Laws shall be conducted to minimize adverse environmental impacts on National Forest System (NFS) surface resources. The action is also needed to determine the mitigation measures needed to protect National Forest resources and improvements from impacts associated with mineral activity. The mitigation measures would be incorporated into the approved Plan of Operations.



PREVIOUS MINERAL EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES

The Lake Mountain- Muddy Mountain-Lake Owen geographic area is one of four areas in south central Wyoming that has rock formations that might contain Platinum deposits. Non-ground disturbing mineral exploration, such as a magnetometer survey, has been done in the past by various companies. Magnetometer surveys are done on foot with equipment being carried in a backpack. The magnetometer survey identifies areas with a magnetic anomaly in the earth's magnetic field, thus indicating a rock formation that might contain minerals. These rock formations are typically tested and sampled where the bedrock is exposed at ground level. Magnetometer surveys were approved by the Forest Service.

However, in the Lake Mountain-Muddy Mountain-Lake Owen geographic area, the bedrock formations are usually not exposed, but are covered by at least 40 feet of glaciated material. A practical way to test the rock formations when the bedrock is not exposed is to obtain samples by core drilling. Core drilling projects have taken place in this geographic area, with the Forest Service approving the Plan of Operation after developing and including mitigation measures to minimize resource impacts. The last core drilling project in the area was in 2002 and 2003, near the end of NFSR 527.

PROPOSED ACTION

Magnetometer surveys were done on unpatented mining claims in the Lake Mountain-Muddy Mountain-Lake Owen geographic area in 2004 and 2006. RMP Resources Corporation has submitted a Plan of Operation to conduct further mineral exploration activities by core drilling.

The action proposed by the Forest Service is to approve the Plan of Operations for Mineral Exploration by RMP Resources Corporation. Approval of the Plan of Operations would allow RMP Resources Corporation to construct eleven (11) drill sites and obtain core samples from a hole drilled at each of the 11 sites. The proponent would like to start drilling in the summer of 2007 and be done with drilling by November 2007. Refilling the sumps, recontouring the drill sites and seeding of each drill site would take place in the summer of 2008. Please see the attached map.

Each drill site would be approximately 20 feet by 60 feet in size, with a sump (pit) within this disturbed area for water recirculation. The sump would be approximately 8 feet long by 4 feet wide by 6 feet deep. A backhoe would be used to construct the drill site and sump about one week prior to the drilling rig truck and support vehicles arriving at the drill site. Drilling of each hole would take between one to two weeks. The drill holes would be approximately 4 inches in diameter, with the core samples being about 2½ inches in diameter. The drill holes would be 800 to 1500 feet deep and would be plugged as per State of Wyoming Water Quality Rules and Regulations. It is estimate that the total area of disturbance for the eleven (11) drill sites is **0.33 acres**. Parking of vehicles around the drill sites is expected to impact another **0.3 acres**, without removing the natural vegetation

Access would be by existing roads, with no road construction or reconstruction to be done. Drill sites would be adjacent to existing roads. The roads used to access the various drill sites are National Forest System Roads (NFSRs) 500B, 517, 527, 527C, 527CB, 541, 552, and 552A.

Three of these roads are behind locked gates. As per Medicine Bow National Forest Road Operations Policy (FSM 7731.03 – Med Bow Supplement 7700-93-01), RMP Resources personnel and Forest Service personnel would obtain written authorization from the Laramie District Ranger to use the closed roads prior to the start of work. The closed gates would remain closed, with interlocking locks being placed on the specified gates and for a specified period of time. The closed roads would remain closed to the general public. Open roads would not be blocked by drilling activities and support vehicles. Closed roads may be temporarily blocked by the support vehicles during drilling.

Drilling the hole would be accomplished by a truck mounted or trailer mounted drilling rig. Support vehicles for drilling would include a pipe truck, equipment truck, pickup truck for the drilling crew, and a water hauling truck, which is typically a 5-ton truck with a 1000 gallon tank.

Water would be used for drilling fluid. Nontoxic drill additives would be added to the water. The sump at each drill site would be used to settle the cuttings from the drill bit and to act as a temporary reservoir so that water can be re-circulated in the drilling process. It is estimated that approximately 1500 gallons of water per day would be needed. Water for drilling would be obtained from a local landowner adjacent to National Forest System (NFS) land. The City of Cheyenne Board of Public Utilities (CBPU) was contacted by RMP Resource Corporation to obtain water from Lake Owen itself. This request was refused by CBPU.

As mentioned previously, drilling of the holes is expected to be completed by November 2007. Filling in the sumps, recontouring the drill sites, and seeding the drill sites are expected to take place in the summer of 2008. The 20 foot by 60 foot disturbed area at each drill site is expected to revegetate naturally. However, as recommended by the Medicine Bow/Routt National Forest Range Management and Botany Cadre, a cover crop of cultivated weed-free barley or cultivated weed-free soft white winter wheat will be planted. This will help stabilize the drill sites and minimize movement of sediment while the adjacent native vegetation grows back into the disturbed drill site area.

As mentioned previously, the drill holes would be plugged as per State of Wyoming Water Quality Rules and Regulations. Plugging would probably consist of setting a plug in the hole below groundwater depth, filling the hole with cement or bentonite chips, cutting off the surface casing three feet below ground level, capping the surface casing, and filling in the top three feet of the drill hole with dirt from the drill site.

As stated previously, drill sites would be located adjacent to existing roads. These drill sites have not been specifically identified on the ground yet, but the general vicinity of each is known. Drill sites would be designated by RMP Resources personnel, with Forest Service concurrence, prior to the start of work. The following factors will be considered in selecting each drill site.

Terrain: Locate drill sites on flat to gently rolling ground so that the movement of sediment from the drill site to adjacent areas is minimal. If movement of sediment is expected, drill sites would be located on the uphill side of existing roads, if possible, so that the road and/or road ditch acts as a sediment trap. Straw bales would be used on the downhill side of the drill site as a sediment trap when deemed necessary.

Timber: Drill sites would be located in sawtimber stands, poletimber stands, regenerated clearcuts with pine saplings, and in open areas. Drill sites would be located within existing opening within timber stands, if possible. Stumps would be cut as close to the ground as practical. Limbs would be removed from the cut trees. Limbs and tops would be piled at least 100 feet away from the existing road. The boles of the cut trees (4 inches in diameter or larger) would be cut into four foot lengths and stacked next to the existing road. Stumps removed by the construction of the drill pad and sump would be stored at the side of the drill site during drilling operations. Upon conclusion of drilling, the stumps will be placed in the sump so that they would be buried when the sump is filled in.

Cultural Resources: A cultural resource survey will be made as the drill sites are selected. If cultural materials are noted, the drill site would be moved and located away from the identified cultural material.

Wildlife: A wildlife survey will be conducted in the Lake Mountain/Muddy Mountain area. A Biological Assessment/Biological Evaluation will be done, with the recommendations of this document being followed. There are known Goshawk nests in the general area. Drill site locations would be selected to not impact Goshawk nesting activities. If a nesting area cannot be avoided, timing restrictions designating when to drill a particular hole would be included in the approved Plan of Operations so that impacts to the nesting raptors would be minimized.

Wetlands and Riparian Areas: Drill sites will not be located on wetlands or in riparian areas.

Med Bow Trail: Two of the proposed drill locations are next to the abandoned railroad bed that is now the Med Bow Trail. Access to these two locations would be along National Forest System Road (NFSR) #552, which parallels the railroad bed itself. These drill sites would be between the Lincoln Creek Trailhead and Lake Owen itself.

It is known that NFSR #552 is a very rough four-wheel drive road with very little clearance for vehicles driving along it. NFSR #552 is a popular route for ATV users. RMP Resources Corporation has been asked to consider relocating these two proposed drill sites to other nearby areas that can be accessed by different roads. However, if RMP Resources Corporation does not relocate the two drill holes near the Med Bow Trail, specifications to minimize the cutting of trees and limbs for vehicle clearance would be included in the approved Plan of Operation. Timing restrictions specifying when RMP Resources Corporation could drill the two proposed holes would also be included in the approved Plan of Operation.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS AND DOCUMENTS

The Revised Medicine Bow National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (2003 Forest Plan) is an overall strategy designed to guide the management of the Forest. The intent of the direction in the Forest Plan is to manage NFS lands for multiple uses. To accommodate multiple-use management, the Forest Plan contains direction for different Management Areas.

Each Management area has a different management emphasis. One (1) drill site falls within Management area 5.15 (Forest Products, Ecological Maintenance and Restoration Considering the Historic Range of Variability and ten (10) drill sites fall within Management Area 5.13 (Forest Products). Table 2-2 (Selected activities permitted or restricted according to management area prescriptions) on pages 2-3 and 2-4 of the 2003 Forest Plan shows that Locatable Mineral activities are permitted within Management Areas 5.15 and 5.13.

One drill site is within the Middle Fork Geographic Area, four drill sites are within the Upper Douglas Creek Geographic Area, and six drill sites are within the Lower Douglas Creek Geographic Area. There are no area specific desired conditions, objectives, strategies, standards or guidelines for the three geographic areas that are directly related to locatable mineral activities.

The proponents Plan of Operation deals with a Locatable Mineral (hardrock minerals that are mined and processed for the recovery of metals), which is a different category of minerals than a Leasable Mineral (oil, gas, coal, etc.). See Appendix G (Glossary) of the 2003 Forest Plan (Pages G-19 and G-20) for definitions of these two mineral categories.

Leasable Minerals have designated stipulations per management area, as shown in Appendix E of the 2003 Forest Plan. However, this proposed Plan of Operation is dealing with a Locatable Mineral proposal, with the stipulations shown in Appendix E not being applicable. Because of the extreme variability in Locatable Mineral associated activities, each Plan of Operation and its proposed activities needs to be evaluated on a case by case basis to determine the environmental impacts and the mitigation measures needed to reasonably protect the natural resources

DECISIONS TO BE MADE

Prior to issuing a decision concerning the Plan of Operations, the analysis results and public comments submitted during the public participation process will be considered. The decision will include a determination as to where and under what terms and conditions RMP Resources Corporation may access and conduct mineral exploration by core drilling while also protecting the surface natural resources in the area.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Scoping is an important part of the environmental analysis process and is used to determine the scope of issues to be addressed and to identify the significant issues related to a proposal (40 CFR 1501.7). For these reasons, I encourage you to take the time to consider the proposal and to submit your comments on it as noted in this scoping letter. No other formal public comment period regarding this action or the environmental analysis is planned. All persons will provide comment in response to this request will continue to receive information about this project and will be included in any additional public participation effort that may occur. Those who do not respond will not receive additional information. To be able to appeal, any person, non-Federal agency or entity has to provide comment or otherwise expressed interest in a particular proposed action by the end of the comment period.

Following review of public comments, a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis will be completed to determine the impacts associated with the proposed mineral exploration activity and to determine what mitigation measures are necessary to minimize adverse environmental impacts to the natural resources and improvements in the area. This analysis will also include coordination with other government agencies, including but not limited to the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, the Wyoming State Engineer's Office, the Corps of Engineers Office, and the United States Department of Interior Fish and Wildlife Service.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the *Laramie Boomerang* (newspaper of record). The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for the proposed mineral exploration activity. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period. Written comments should be submitted to:

Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests
ATTN: Mike Winters, Lands, Minerals, Special Uses
2468 Jackson Street
Laramie, WY 82070
Facsimile: (307) 745-2398

OR

E-mail: comments-rocky-mountain-medicine-bow-routt-laramie@fs.fed.us. (Acceptable formats for electronic comments are: rtf, pdf or word.)

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Those commenting should include (1) name, address, telephone number, organization represented – if any, (2) title of the document on which the comment is being submitted, and (3) specific facts and supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have eligibility to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215 or 217. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR, Subpart B, Section 1.27(d), 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 of confidentiality, and where 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 within 10 days.

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For more information concerning this project, please contact Mike Winters, Lands, Minerals, Special Uses, at (307) 745-2317.

Thank you for caring about your National Forest!

Sincerely,

/s/ Frank E. Romero
FRANK E. ROMERO
Acting District Ranger

Enclosure: Map