

DECISION MEMO
Gros Ventre Mineral Exploration Project

USDA Forest Service
Jackson Ranger District
Bridger-Teton National Forest
Teton County, Wyoming
Parts of sections 30 and 31, T42N, R111W, 6th Principal Meridian

DECISION

It is the decision of the Bridger-Teton National Forest to authorize Maverick Exploration, Inc. to excavate 12 trenches to conduct assay work and determine the feasibility for using a dry electrostatic separation process for extracting gold, silver and platinum from placer deposits along Cottonwood Creek about 2 miles above its confluence with Fish Creek, located in the upper Gros Ventre drainage. The area that is being authorized is no more than 5 acres in size. Excavation and prospecting would be allowed between July 1 and November 1st through 2008 and 2009.

The trenches will be 10 ft. to 12 ft. in depth, 3 ft. to 4 ft. in width, and no more than 30 ft. in length. Since the electrostatic process requires dry material, wetlands and riparian areas will be avoided. A backhoe will be used to excavate materials that will then be sampled for mineral content as well as characterized in terms of particle sizes so that concentrations and recovery rates of the precious metals can be determined. Excavated material will be screened so that the finer particles can be processed further to extract gold and other precious metals. Excavation sites will be backfilled to restore natural contours prior to moving on to the next location. Sites will be reseeded with a Forest Service approved native seed mix. A bond will be required to cover the cost of rehabilitation.

Roughly 4 personnel will be needed to conduct this work. Additional individuals may be used to re-supply the camp. The crew will stay in a trailer on-site and would be required to haul out all trash and human waste. The list of equipment to be used includes the following:

- Case model 580 D Super or equivalent backhoe – everyday use
- Case model 90 skid loader or equivalent – everyday use
- Grizzly / Screener – everyday use to classify material to appropriate size
- Pickup trucks – used to transport and supply equipment to and from the site
- Electrical generator – used daily
- Camp trailer (self contained) – used daily
- 5th wheel gooseneck trailer – used to transport equipment and supplies to and from the site

Project mitigations include:

- Operations will be halted, relocated, and modified as necessary in the event that cultural resources or sensitive plant populations are discovered.
- No new roads will be constructed.
- Access to the project area must occur on National Forest System Trails and Roads that

are authorized for motorized travel on the travel plan. ATVs should not be used off designated routes.

- Motorized travel to and from the site will be minimized as much as possible to avoid conflict with wildlife and other users of the National Forest.
- Dogs must remain under the owners control at all times.
- No water diversions will be permitted.
- Noise levels must be reduced as much as possible in order to reduce conflicts with the public and wildlife and to retain the natural condition of the forest.
- Forest Service must approve the location of staging areas for trailers and support equipment, which will preferably be located on existing disturbed areas.
- Top soil will be stored separately from spoils and reapplied on the surface during reclamation.
- Reclamation will be done to Forest Service specifications and will include travel ways and staging areas as well as the excavation areas.
- Back filling of excavated trenches and reclaiming with top soil will be completed prior to moving on to the next trench.
- No activity will occur within 200 feet of Cottonwood Creek.
- Grizzly bear food storage order 04-00-104 will be followed.
- Sieving of particles with the “grizzly” will be done next to each hole to avoid disturbing a larger area with cross-country travel to a centralized location.
- No equipment will be present or activity conducted prior to July 1 or later than November 1st.
- Bonding will be required in the amount equivalent to that needed for site reclamation.
- Human waste, trash, and petroleum based products will be hauled to a suitable location off National Forest System lands.
- "Timely seeding" using FS approved seed mix will occur in consultation with the Wyoming Game and Fish habitat biologist on the appropriate seed species.
- All equipment shall be washed prior to moving onto National Forest Systems lands each time the equipment re-enters the National Forest from non-National Forest System lands.
- The proponent will be responsible for noxious weed control for up to 3 years following site reclamation.
- The proponent will prepare and the Forest Service must approve the spill plan for fuels and chemicals used in equipment.
- The proponent will maintain a spill kit on-site and personnel will be trained in its use.
- The proponent is responsible for obtaining any necessary permits from the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality and Army Corp of Engineers.

BACKGROUND

This claim has been held by the Sturlin family under the name of Goldwest Corporations from the late 1960's through to 2005. Prospecting, exploration, and mining activities have occurred throughout this period until the early to mid 1990s and are successfully reclaimed. To date, mining the deposits has not proven commercially viable because the very fine particles of “flour” gold are hard to recover. The Sturlin family allowed the claim to lapse in 2006. Placer claim relocation notices were executed in February 2007 with Maverick Exploration Inc. replacing Goldwest Corporation as the operator. The Notice of Intent for this current proposal was received on March 17, 2007 and a site visit with Forest Service personnel occurred on May 10, 2007. This project has been on the Schedule of Proposed Actions since the last quarter of 2007.

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

It has been determined that this action falls within a category of action listed in the Forest Service NEPA Handbook (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30) that is excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS and that no extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude use of the category. The specific category is 31.2.8 “Short-term (one 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 one mile of low standard road (Service Level D, FSH 7709.56), or use and minor repair of existing roads.” No significant impacts to the elements contained in extraordinary circumstances are anticipated and none are evident from similar past exploration activities in this area.

The cultural resource survey for the project revealed the project will have no effect to cultural resources.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Forest Service specialists, interested publics, and relevant agencies have been consulted regarding environmental concerns, including feature articles in the Jackson Hole Daily News and Guide. No issues were raised through these processes that identified any significant impacts or concerns related to this project that are not mitigated in the project design.

The Teton County Commissioners and the Wyoming Outdoor Council requested that the Forest Service take a more comprehensive look into future exploration and prospecting activities. Until the test operations approved in this decision are completed and evaluated, there is no way to determine whether or not future operations will occur and to what type and degree. If the electrostatic recover process is cost effective and new proposals are submitted, then the Forest Service and the public will have an additional opportunity to evaluate and disclose the effects through the NEPA process.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

This decision is consistent with the [Bridger-Teton National Forest 1990 Forest Plan](#) as required by the National Forest Management Act. In addition, this activity falls under the provisions of the 1872 Mining Law.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision can be implemented 5 business days following the close of the appeal filing period if no appeal is filed. If an appeal is filed, implementation may occur 15 business days following the appeal decision.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OF APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

Those who provide timely comments will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR part 215 regulations.

CONTACT PERSON

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact:

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/s/ Dale A. Deiter

Dale A. Deiter
District Ranger

08/01/2008

Date