



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Okanogan and Wenatchee NF's

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Wenatchee, WA 98801
Phone (509) 664-9200

File Code: 1950, Planning

Date: December 8, 2005

Dear Planning Participant:

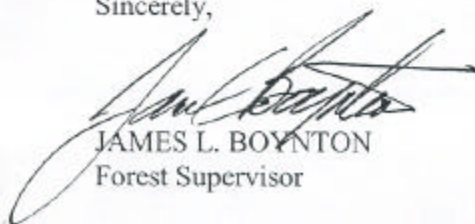
Enclosed please find the copy you requested of the preliminary Environmental Assessment for the Buckhorn Mountain Access Road and Related Activities Project Environmental Assessment. This project would approve access across and occupancy of National Forest System lands for Crown Resources Corporation to access their private lands on Buckhorn Mountain. I have tentatively identified Alternative B1 analyzed in the EA as my preferred alternative. Under this alternative, the Marias Creek road would be reconstructed, along with some new construction. The alternative is a modification of the Crown Resources proposal that includes additional mitigation. The project also includes a project fence, underground utility lines, pipeline and infiltration gallery, monitoring wells, and wetland, fish habitat and livestock improvements.

This preliminary EA is being released for a 30 day comment period pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Comments on the project must be postmarked no later than 30 days after the date of publication of this legal notice in the Wenatchee World and should be addressed to Jan Flatten, on behalf of Forest Supervisor James Boynton, Okanogan Valley Office, 1240 Second Avenue South, Okanogan, WA 98840 (Phone: 509-826-3277; FAX: 509-826-3170; e-mail address: comments-pacificnorthwest-okanogan-tonasket@fs.fed.us). Those submitting hand-delivered comments may do so during regular office hours, 7:45AM to 4:30PM, Monday through Friday, except legal holidays. Those submitting electronic copies must do so only to the e-mail address listed above, must put the project name in the subject line, and must either submit comments as part of the e-mail message or as an attachment only in one of the following three formats: Microsoft Word, rich text format (rtf) or Adobe Portable Document Format (pdf).

Only those who submit timely and substantive comments will be accepted as appellants. For appeal eligibility, each individual or representative from each organization submitting substantive comments must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request. All comments must be fully consistent with the requirements of the June 4, 2003 regulations at 36 CFR 215.6(3).

Anyone wishing to review the project file or obtain additional information on the project should contact Jan Flatten at (509) 826-3277 or Phil Christy at (509) 486-5137.

Sincerely,



JAMES L. BOYNTON
Forest Supervisor



United States
Department
Of Agriculture

Forest Service



December
2005

Buckhorn Mountain Access Road and Related Activities Project

Preliminary Environmental Assessment



Marias Creek Road

Prepared by:
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Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests
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Buckhorn Mountain Access Road and Related Activities Project

December 2005

Preliminary
Environmental Assessment

USDA Forest Service
Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests
Tonasket Ranger District
1 West Winesap
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Responsible Official: James L. Boynton
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Buckhorn Mountain Access Road and Related Activities Project

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Buckhorn Mine Access Roads and Related Activities Project

Chapter 1

Purpose and Need

INTRODUCTION

Crown Resources Corporation has submitted a Plan of Operations (Crown Resources, 2005) to the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests for permission to construct or reconstruct access roads, build a pipeline and a treated water infiltration area, construct fence, drill wells and construct utilities on National Forest System lands to facilitate their plan to mine an ore body on their private lands that are surrounded by Federal lands (National Forest System and Bureau of Land Management lands). The project activities for which the Forest Service has discretion to make a decision are located approximately 3 - 8 air miles east of Chesaw, Washington, in Sections 23-26 and 36, Township 40 North, Range 30 East; Sections 7-9, 16-19, 21, 25-28 and 31-32, Township 40 North, Range 31 East; Sections 1, 2 and 11, Township 39 North, Range 30 East; and Sections 2-5, Township 39 North, Range 31 East, Willamette Meridian (see vicinity map, next page). The ownership status of lands within the project area is presented in the map following the vicinity map.

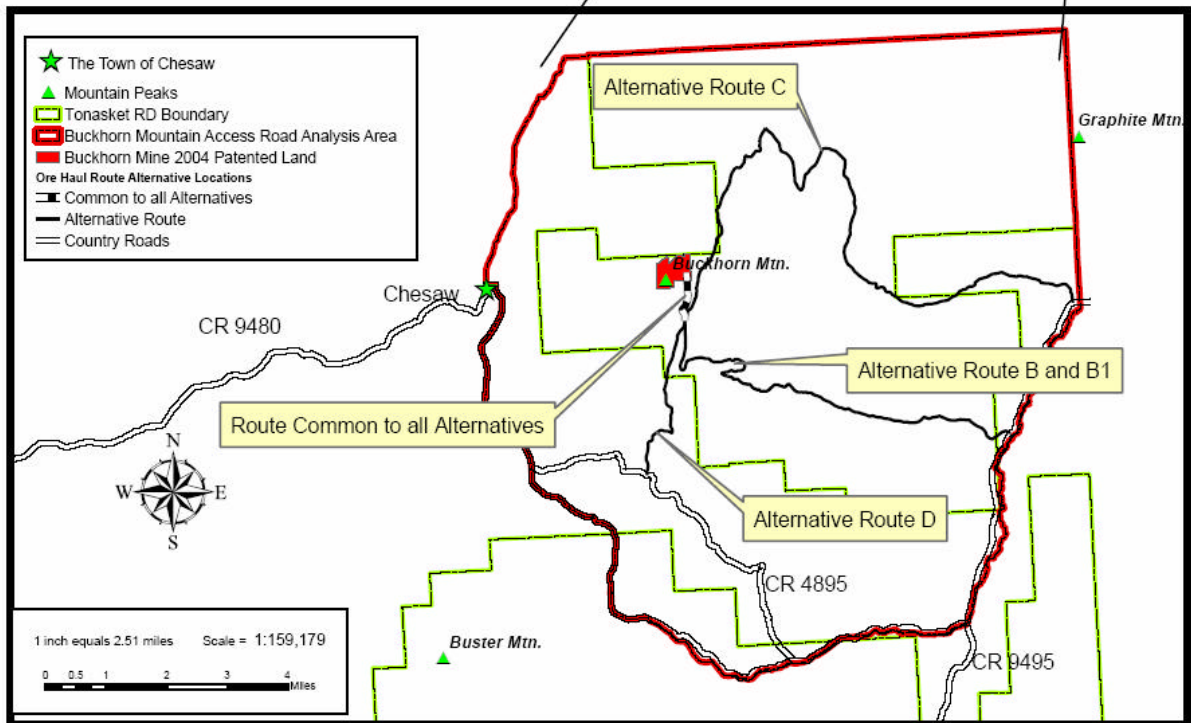
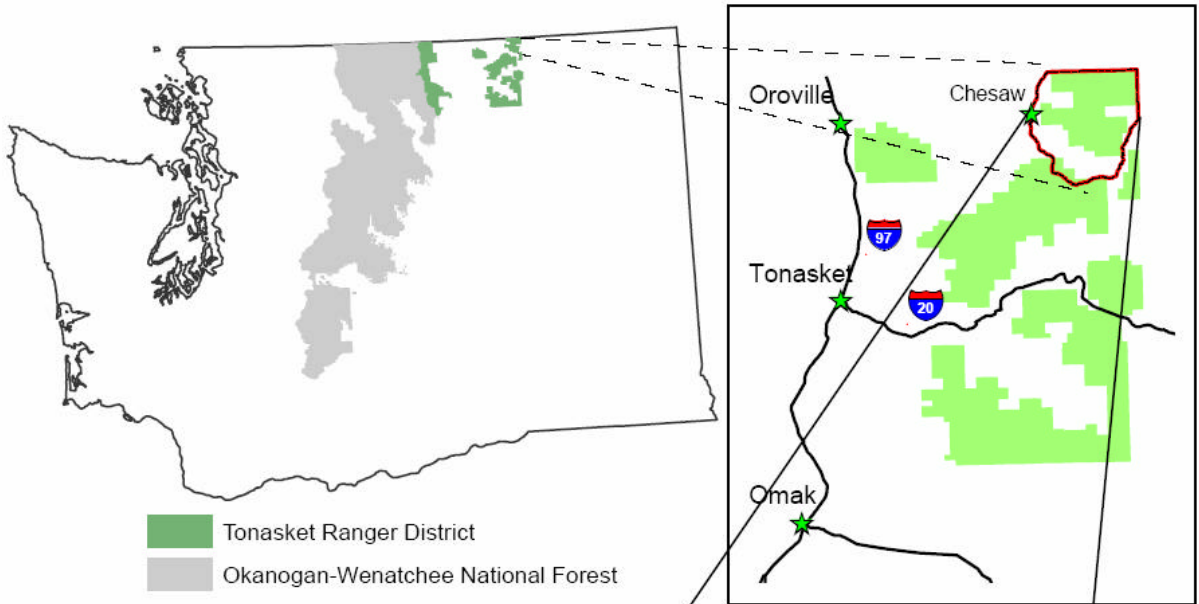
Background

The Buckhorn Mine Access Roads and Related Activities project is proposed to give Crown Resources (the Proponent) access to their private lands within the Buckhorn Block of the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests. This ore body was originally studied as part of the 1997 Crown Jewel Mine project, when the lands under which the ore body is located were under Federal land ownership. The Forest Service and Washington State Department of Ecology prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as joint lead agencies. The 1997 Record of Decision for the final EIS approved an open pit mine, and related activities on National Forest System and Bureau of Land Management lands. Due to a subsequent State of Washington decision to rescind a key permit for the project, Crown Resources submitted a new Plan of Operations for an underground mine in June 2003, and the Forest Service announced a notice of intent to file a supplemental EIS in September 2003. Subsequently, in December 2004, the lands under which the ore body is located were transferred to Crown Resources Corporation ownership through patenting under the 1872 Mining Law.

Once those lands became private land, Forest Service decision space was narrowed to only those activities that still would actually occur on National Forest System lands and rights of way; Crown Resources submitted an amended Plan of Operations covering only those activities in March 2005. The Forests withdrew their notice of intent to file a supplemental EIS. The Forests initiated new scoping on those activities over which the Forest Service still had decision authority in March 2005. The State of Washington, Department of Ecology, is continuing with preparation of a supplemental environmental impact statement for the entire mine project.

Project Vicinity Map

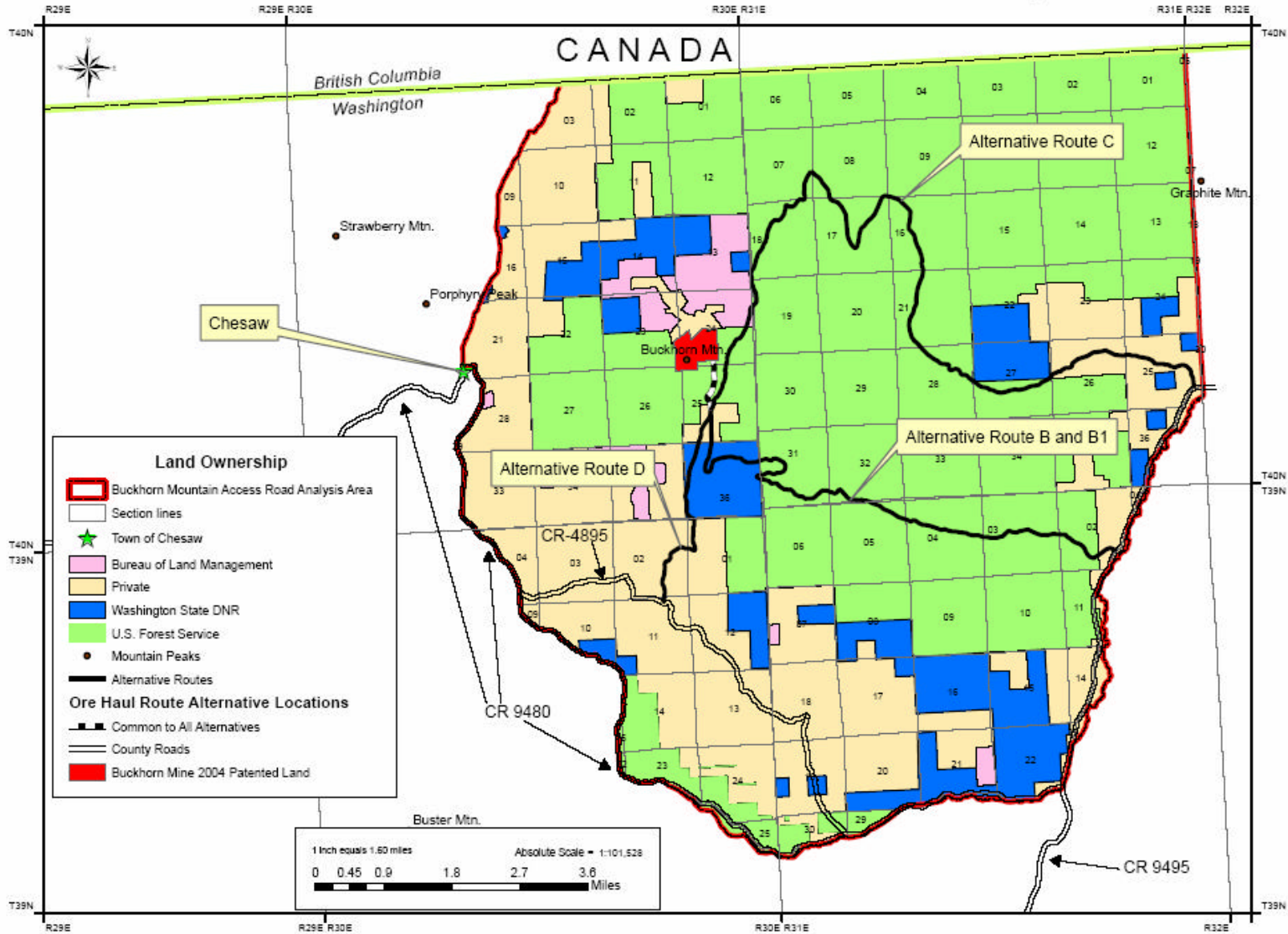
Buckhorn Mountain Access Road and Related Activities Project



Printed 9/01/05

Map by J.Rainford Okanogan-Wenatchee N.F.

Buckhorn Mountain Access Road and Related Activities Project



Management Direction

This project implements (is tiered to) the Okanogan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan; Forest Service, 1989). The Forest Plan has a forest-wide standard and guideline that requires mining claimants be given reasonable access to their mining claims (Forest Plan, page 4-47). In addition, the Forest Plan allocated this project area into several “zones” called management areas, each with a different management emphasis (see Management Area Map, next page):

- MA-5 – recreation/scenery emphasis (4%)
- MA14 – wildlife emphasis (11%)
- MA 17 – developed recreation emphasis (<1%)
- MA25 – timber/range emphasis (52%)
- MA26 – deer winter range emphasis (33%)

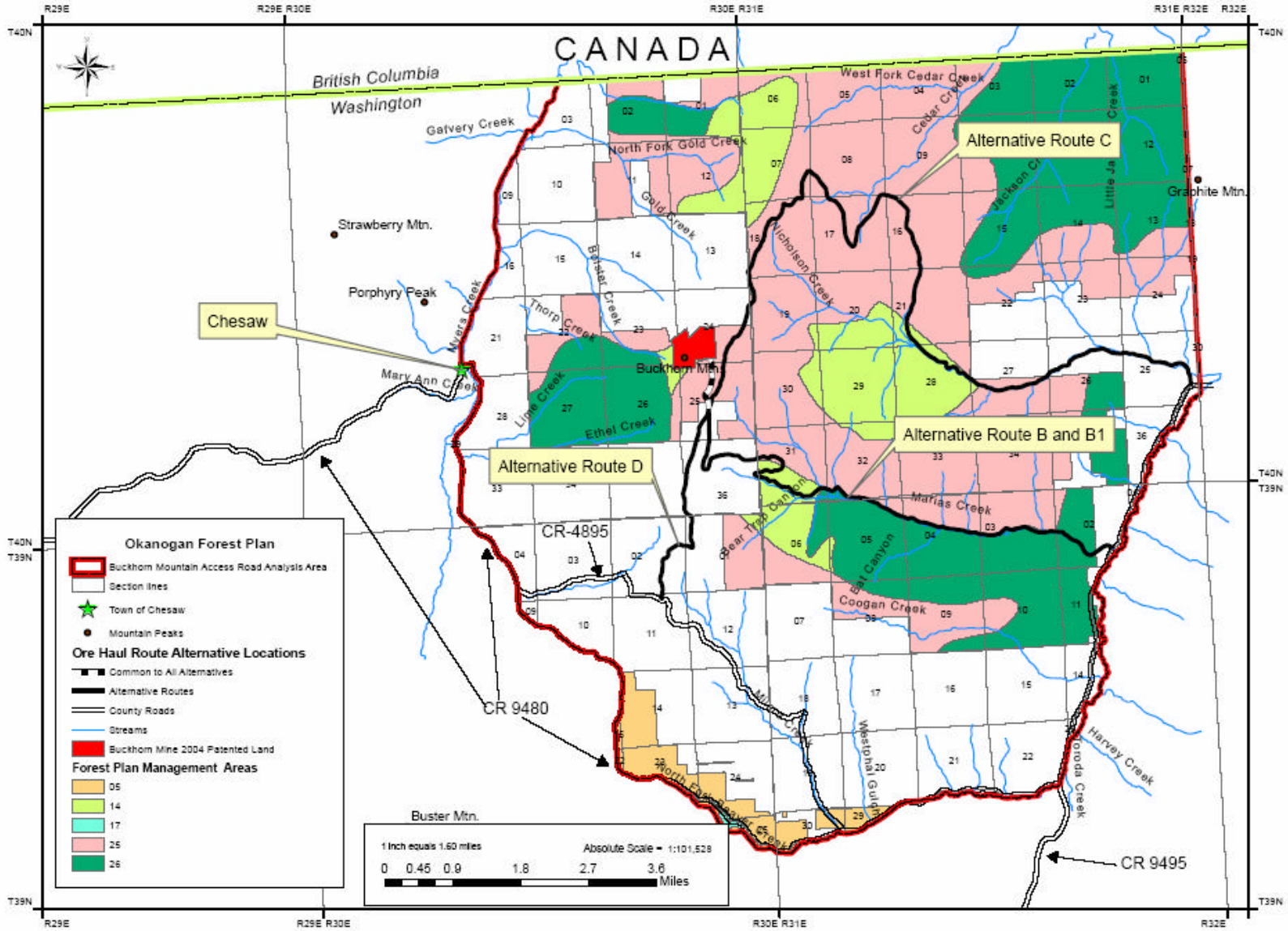
These management areas all have management area specific standards and guidelines that apply within the management area. To the extent that reasonable mineral access can be provided, management area standards and guidelines must be met. In addition, management area direction for the area is provided by the Inland Native Fish Strategy (Forest Service, 1995). Together these documents are referred to as the amended Forest Plan.

The Crown Jewel Mine project described above amended a portion of the project area, establishing a new Management Area (MA-27) which established new standards and guidelines that could be met with an open pit mining project. The open pit mine was never implemented, and this project will consider the original management areas when making decisions regarding the need to meet direction in the amended Forest Plan.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose and need for the project is to respond to Crown’s request to occupy National Forest System lands for certain mining related facilities and provide reasonable access to these facilities and to Crown’s patented lands, while minimizing impacts to National Forest System lands and considering impacts to residents living along National Forest rights-of-way. The 1872 Mining Law and the amended Forest Plan as described above, require that mining claimants be given reasonable access to mining claims. The newly patented lands are an inholding surrounded by National Forest System and Bureau of Land Management lands, and the mining claimant has no other reasonable access. The Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA), also provides for access to non-federally owned land adequate to secure the owner reasonable use and enjoyment thereof within National Forest System lands and lands managed by the Secretary of the Interior under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. Several amendments to the LRMP may be needed to fulfill this need because reasonable access may not be able to be granted without allowing access through deer winter range or exceeding road density standards in the LRMP. In addition the patenting of the Buckhorn Mountain area left Management Area 14-19 in three small parcels, which makes manageability of the area difficult.

Buckhorn Mountain Access Road and Related Activities Project



PROPOSED ACTION

The Forest Supervisor for the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests proposes to approve Crown Resource Corporation's Plan of Operations to reconstruct 5.25 miles of the Forest Roads 3550 and 3550-125; construct 1.5 miles of new access road off the end of Forest Road 3550-125 to the lower portal of the mine; and to build a fence, a pipe line, a treated water infiltration area and access roads, monitoring wells, and underground utility conduits (power line, data line, telephone line) on National Forest System lands and rights-of-way. The Proponent would be permitted to utilize these roads daily to haul ore and supplies to and from the private land inholding, once construction is complete. Trucks, averaging approximately 55 round trips per day (50 ore trucks and 5 supply trucks), would haul along the route, although average daily trips would increase just before and after spring breakup, when hauling is not feasible or permitted. Employee access, 24 hours/day, would be allowed on the haul route and Forest Roads 3575-120, 3575, 3575-100, and 3575-150. Only the haul route, Forest Roads 3575-120 and 3575-140 to the water tower, access roads to the infiltration gallery and pipeline (3575-120, 3575-125, 3575-127, and 3575-142), and to monitoring wells and surface water monitoring sites may be snowplowed. In addition the following structures would be constructed to compensate for impacts to wildlife and range operations:

- a corral in lower Marias Creek,
- a well servicing three cattle troughs in mid-Marias Creek
- a water augmentation line from the infiltration gallery pipeline to the Roosevelt Adit and to a new water trough in upper Marias Creek, and
- fish pools in Marias and Nicholson Creeks.

During initial construction, about 8 months in length, the Pontiac Ridge/Cow Camp access route, Forest Road 3575-120, and Forest Road 3575-140 would be used by the Proponent. After approximately 3 months for construction/ reconstruction of the Marias Creek haul road, most construction traffic would switch to that route.

The proposed action would require amendments to three Forest Plan standards and guidelines, two relating to road density, and one relating to designation of an open route through deer winter range. Road density standards would be exceeded in MA14-18 and 14-19, and the Marias Creek road would be designated as an open route where it passes through deer winter range in MA-14 and MA-26. In addition, the three small parcels left of MA14-19 after land patenting would be combined with their adjacent management areas.

DECISION FRAMEWORK

The Forest Supervisor for the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests must decide whether or not to approve the Proponent's Plan of Operations as submitted, or approve a Plan of Operation for another route or with additional mitigation measures and monitoring items. The Forest Supervisor will consider both the impacts as a result of project activities on National Forest System lands and rights-of-way, and cumulative impacts off of National Forest System lands in choosing the preferred alternative. The Forest Supervisor must also decide whether or not to amend the Okanogan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan to implement the project.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND CONSULTATION

Scoping

On March 29, 2005 a scoping package was mailed to the list of individuals who had been known to have commented during the 2003 scoping process or on the Crown Jewel Project draft EIS. Some individuals were apparently missed in that mailing and an additional mailing was done in April 2005, including residents on rural postal routes and post office box holders in the vicinity of the project, and all individuals were notified that the scoping period was being extended by 15 days. Over 100 letters were received in response to the 2005 scoping effort.

Consultation

Separate government to government consultation was conducted with the Yakama Indian Nation and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation. Consultation was initiated in September, 2003, and continued through development of this environmental assessment. The Yakama Indian Nation expressed no concerns regarding the project. Consultation with the Confederated Tribes is ongoing. Numerous meetings to explain the project and its effects, and consult with the Colville Tribal Council and its sub-committees and personnel have been held.

The State Historic Preservation Office is currently involved in consultation on this project.

Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was initiated in September 2004 prior to the land patenting. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the Forests determination that the project would not adversely affect any threatened or endangered species. Consultation on the project is ongoing.

Issues

Issues were identified during the scoping process that raised concerns about the proposed action. These issues were utilized to develop alternatives or additional mitigation and monitoring not included in the proposed action. The significant issues, and how the analysis process measured the response to them are listed below:

1. Construction of the boundary fence on National Forest System lands will remove more land than was patented from use by wildlife, recreationists, Tribal members, and the grazing permittee.

Measured by:

- *Acres closed on NFS lands,*
- *Miles of boundary fence on NFS lands, and*
- *Qualitative discuss of impact of boundary fence on wildlife, recreationists, Tribal members and grazing permittee.*

2. Cows will get inside the mine boundary fence or could be injured or killed on access roads, increasing range permittee expenses.

Measured by:

- *Qualitative discussion of the potential for cows to get inside fence and potential for increased permittee expenses,*
- *Miles of road fenced from access roads,*
- *Miles of fence constructed, and*
- *Estimated numbers of cows killed or injured annually.*

3. Construction, reconstruction and haul along the proposed haul routes will cause sedimentation and toxic substances to enter and degrade riparian areas and wetlands, decreasing water quality, and adversely impacting fish, amphibians, and plants that use these areas.

Measured by:

- *Tons of sediment increased,*
- *Acres of construction within riparian habitat conservation areas,*
- *Acres of construction in riparian habitat,*
- *Acres of construction in wetlands,*
- *Acres of construction within wetland riparian habitat conservation areas,*
- *Water temperature increases,*
- *Number of sensitive plants destroyed,*
- *Estimated annual tons/gallons of toxic supplies hauled over National Forest System lands, and*
- *Qualitative discussion regarding potential for toxic substances to enter streams, riparian areas, aquatic species and wetlands.*

4. Construction, reconstruction, haul, and employee traffic on proposed haul routes will cause air quality degradation from dust, exhaust and other toxic substances that will impact vegetation, tourism, recreational activities, viewpoints, aesthetic enjoyment of the area, and the quality of life, health, safety and solitude for residents.

Measured by:

- *Tons of total suspended particulates (TSP) produced,*
- *Tons of PM10 size particulate matter produced,*
- *Qualitative discussion of effects of dust on vegetation,*
- *Number of potential viewpoints where dust is likely to be seen,*
- *Number of residences along each potential haul route,*
- *Cumulative number of residences along potential haul route to junction of Forest Road 3575 and Okanogan County Road 9495,*
- *Qualitative discussion regarding impact on residential quality of life, health, safety and solitude,*
- *Number of dispersed sites along potential haul routes,*
- *Qualitative discussion regarding impact on recreation,*
- *Changes in visibility in Class I airsheds, and*

- *Miles of proposed road pavement on ore haul route.*
5. Heavy mine traffic will increase noise from trucks and use of compression brakes, which will impact tourism, recreational activities, aesthetic enjoyment of the area, the potential wilderness, and the quality of life and solitude for residents. Noise from the new road on the open south facing slopes of Marias Creek will carry for long distances and potentially impact property owners along Pontiac Ridge road and Millard Creek. Noise adjacent to the Jackson Creek Inventoried Roadless Area could affect its potential for wilderness designation.

Measured by:

- *Qualitative discussion on potential noise effects on Coogan and Nicholson-Marias Ridge unroaded areas,*
 - *Number of residences along potential haul routes,*
 - *Number of dispersed sites along potential haul routes,*
 - *Noise levels at 50', 100', 200' and 500' from haul routes,*
 - *Acres with noticeable noise effects on Jackson Creek inventoried roadless area,*
 - *Qualitative discussion of effect on future potential wilderness designation of Jackson Creek inventoried roadless area, and*
 - *Qualitative discussion regarding impacts on residential quality of life and solitude from noise.*
6. Project activities will disturb wildlife, including threatened, endangered and sensitive species, through human presence, noise, and increased road density, and will create a semi-impermeable barrier to movement from the ore truck route.

Measured by:

- *Acres of impacted lands within set distances of haul and supply routes during construction and during operations for species sensitive to disturbance (distance varies by species),*
 - *Acres of impacted lands within set distances of likely employee routes for species sensitive to disturbance (distance varies by species),*
 - *Road density by management area,*
 - *Miles of road in deer winter range,*
 - *Miles of road in deer summer range, and*
 - *Qualitative discussion of impacts from barrier along haul routes.*
7. Traffic to and from the mine will spread noxious weeds onto National Forest System lands or from National Forest System lands to other ownerships. The company's proposal to use herbicides to treat noxious weeds has the potential to affect non-target species.

Measured by:

- *Acres of soil disturbance,*
- *Acres of existing noxious weeds along haul routes,*

- *Potential for use of herbicides under existing decisions, and cumulative effects analysis of effect on non-target species, and*
- *Qualitative discussion of potential for weed spread onto NFS lands across NFS lands and from NFS lands to private lands.*

8. The proposed action will have cumulative impacts with the mine and borrow site, which will have significant effects on the environment, and will have cumulative impacts with other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

Measured by:

- *Decreases in area stream flows at average annual precipitation for cumulative activities*
- *Number of seeps, springs, ponds and wetland lost from cumulative activities*

9. Use of dust suppression or snow removal chemicals and/or water may cause erosion or other impacts to streams, wetlands and riparian areas.

Measured by:

- *Pounds of increased erosion by alternative,*
- *Sediment increases by alternative,*
- *Potential for chemicals to reach streams, wetlands, RHCAs and riparian habitat,*
- *Qualitative discussion of the effects of magnesium and sodium chloride on vegetation,*
- *Potential increases of chlorides in streams, and*
- *Qualitative discussion of increases in chlorides on aquatic species.*

10. Increasing daily haul trips before and after spring break up will greatly increase impacts of homeowners along routes.

Measured by:

- *Increased number of daily trips by alternative during breakup,*
- *Number of homeowners along each route, and*
- *Qualitative discussion of impacts to homeowners along routes during breakup.*

11. Road construction, reconstruction, haul, employee traffic, and mining will adversely affect members of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and may impact cultural resources of concern to Tribal members, and their reserved rights reserved by Executive Order, to hunt, fish and gather on the former north half of the Colville Reservation.

Measured by:

- *Number of historic properties affected;*
- *Big game expected to be lost due to project activities,*

- *Fish expected to be lost due to project activities,*
- *Qualitative discussion of potential to impact cultural plants,*
- *Indian allotments within 2 miles of haul, employee and supply routes, and*

12. Mine traffic has the potential to disturb residents during non-haul hours along Forest Service rights-of-way.

Measured by:

- *Hours of expected truck traffic outside of 6AM to 6PM,*
- *Hours of operation along haul, employee and supply routes,*
- *Number of vehicles expected to operate outside of 6AM to 6PM, and*
- *Miles of proposed road pavement on ore haul route.*

13. The water infiltration gallery on National Forest System lands will impact water quality and quantity in seeps, springs, ponds, wetlands, aquifers, residential wells and creeks. The infiltration gallery does not belong on National Forest System lands.

Measured by:

- *Acres of disturbance from water infiltration gallery and related facilities,*
- *Potential impacts to flows to springs, seeps, ponds and wetlands as a result of water infiltration,*
- *Potential increases in chlorides in streams and aquifers, and*
- *Qualitative discussion on potential for impacts on aquifers, residential wells and creeks from water infiltration.*

Non-Significant Issues and Rationale

1. Crown should provide access to the mine site for the public for educational purposes (Mine is on private land and Forest Service has no control).
2. The planned infiltration facility will cause light pollution (Crown's plan includes mitigation; only one streetlight is planned; not a significant issue).
3. Cow Camp and Pontiac Ridge roads are narrow, winding and too dangerous for mine traffic (not a significant issue – would be handled by design. Pontiac Ridge road is outside the scope of the Forest Service decision).
4. Improving access to the mine will result in increased timber harvest (not a significant issue; no foreseeable actions proposed).
5. Widening the Pontiac Ridge route will impact riparian areas along that route and require a "taking" from private landowners along the route (County road right of way would accommodate any widening. Not a significant issue with the proposed action because County Road even through NFS lands, although would be handled in cumulative effects analysis).

6. Reconstruction of the Beth/Beaver Canyon Road, Okanogan County Road 9480, and allowing ore shipment through the canyon will severely impact the solitude, recreation, and aesthetics of the canyon from dust, noise, safety, and potential for spills into the lakes (not a significant issue – alternative considered but eliminated from detailed study because of these potential impacts).
7. Mine traffic and use of routes by ATV/OHVs are not compatible for safety (ATV/OHV use on Forest Service system roads currently illegal; there is potential for this to change, but to make that change, line officer approval is required).
8. The proposal to use the Marias Creek road instead of the Nicholson Creek road will mean additional impacts on the stretch of Toroda Creek road between its junction with Marias and Nicholson Creek roads (Not a significant issue; both alternatives and their effects will be analyzed).
9. Part of Crown Resources unpatented mining claims have sub-surface use where Forest Service controls surface uses, and must be included in the analysis (Not a significant issue; the Forest Service has confirmed through mapping and with the mining company that no ore removal is planned under NFS lands).
10. The proposed double-lane Marias Creek road would be wider than necessary to accommodate ore haul, which unnecessarily expands impacts. It should be a single lane road with turnouts (not a significant issue; safety is paramount which requires a double lane road).
11. Significant issues 3 to 12 above as they relate to non-Forest Service controlled haul routes (approval on actions on these lands is outside Forest Service decision space, although they will be considered in cumulative effects analysis).

Additional information relating to all comments received during scoping is located on the issue tracking sheets in the project file.