

Decision Summary – Roadless

Project Name	Herbert Gold Project, 2021 Surface Exploration Drilling		
Forest	Tongass National Forest	Region	10
Choose Type of Activity (Wilderness, Roadless, Energy infrastructure, Minerals, Vegetation CE, Land Management Plan) and level of Decision (No DM, DM, DN/FONSI, ROD)			
Roadless; Minerals exploration categorically excluded under 36 CFR§220.6(e)(8), with a written decision memo.			
Planned Decision Date	March 1, 2021		

Summary Description

Purpose/Need
The Forest Service has received the proposed 2021 Surface Exploration Plan of Operations for the Herbert Gold Project from Grande Portage Resources Ltd. and needs to respond to the proposal. Drilling exploration is necessary for verifying the extent of localized mineral deposits for the Herbert Gold Project. The operating season for this sort of exploration is very limited in southeast Alaska and prompt review and approval is necessary to ensure the operator can contract the appropriate drilling staff and equipment before seasonal weather conditions preclude drilling.
Intended Selected Action
Approve the nine drill sites proposed for 2021 exploration, including one previously drilled location, one location that was previously permitted with no drilling taking place at that site, and seven new locations to be permitted. All nine sites are within the Juneau Urban Inventoried Roadless Area (#305). The proposed drill sites all occur adjacent to the retreating Herbert Glacier - no drilling is proposed on Herbert Glacier. Due to recent glaciation, vegetation in this general area is known to be sparse, mostly limited to scrub brush and small diameter (less than 4 inches) alder. The total amount of land disturbance for this proposal is approximately 0.45 acres. An estimated ten alder trees, all less than 8” diameter, would be removed. Operator access to the site will be primarily via helicopter. No road construction is proposed.
Potentially Significant Effects or Extraordinary Circumstances (if any)
No potentially significant effects or extraordinary circumstances have been identified related to this decision. Should this area ultimately be developed (which would require additional NEPA), there is concern regarding the effects of development on mountain goat winter and kidding habitat and whether these effects could be effectively mitigated. Forest staff have been working jointly with Grand Portage Resources and the Alaska Department of Fish & Game regarding the mountain goat habitat for the past year. Resource specialists are generally confident that these effects can be effectively mitigated during the 2021 exploration phase to which this decision applies.
Public Involvement (include State, local governments and Tribal consultation)
The Tongass NF is just beginning to scope the 2021 surface exploration proposal. There has been exploration drilling on and off since 1999, with consistent annual exploration since 2017. Previous and current scoping efforts have included local and state governments and tribal entities as well as the general public. Previous scoping efforts have not revealed any significant concerns.

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Timeline Considerations (statutory, court-related, administrative) and Objections Status
<p>The Forest Service has limited discretionary authority over development of locatable materials. The right to explore and develop locatable minerals, including right of access, is based on the General Mining Law of May 10, 1872, as amended. Exploration is the first step to location of viable economic mineral resources.</p>