



United States Department of Agriculture  
Forest Service

**PACIFIC SOUTHWEST REGION**

*Restoring, Enhancing and Sustaining Forests in California, Hawaii and the Pacific Islands*

**Sierra National Forest**

# Mining in the National Forest

## Bass Lake Ranger District

The 18 National forests in California encompass nearly 20 percent of or about 20 million acres of public land. About 85 percent is open to mining and prospecting under the General Mining Law of 1872. This law allows prospectors to search for certain locatable minerals that can support a profitable operation, and, upon discovery, locate a mining claim allowing the claimant access to the claim.

In 1974, the Forest Service established regulations, 36 CFR 228 - Subpart A, for the protection of surface resources during mining activities. After finding the valid mineral, the key elements for mining claims are the Notice of Intent and Plan of Operations. There are no official applications for a Notice of Intent, but information should answer the basic questions of who, what, when, where, why and how for a proposed mining activity. The Plan of Operations is a detailed comprehensive description of work to be done, which eventually produces an agreement between the Forest Service and miner.

### STAKING A CLAIM

The General Mining Law of 1872 says that citizens of the United States may locate or “strike” a mining claim on federal lands. The U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) State Office in Sacramento maintains a land status plat index showing what lands are open to mining claim locations. Claimants must file their claims with the appropriate county and with the State office of BLM.

If you are interested in developing a mining claim in the Mariposa area, first contact the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Bass Lake Ranger District headquarters in North Fork or the BLM Ranger in Mariposa. Information is available about local activities and restrictions

### PANNING AND DREDGING

Panning and dredging for placer gold are popular activities in the Mariposa area with the following restrictions:

#### RECREATIONAL PANNING

Recreational gold panning within the National forest may be done on active stream beds on non-navigable waterways flowing through Federal land that are NOT under claim or those that are closed to entry. Panners must follow all established rules and regulations concerning occupancy of forest lands including all required permits for camping, use of fires, etc. If you wish to pan on an active claim, you must obtain permission from the mining claimant. Most of the main stem of the Merced River downstream of Yosemite National Park is currently staked for mining claims.

#### PERMITS FOR DREDGING

All dredging operations require a permit from the California Department of Fish and Game. Permits must be obtained and fees paid before any dredging operations. Dredging also requires the permission of the landowner. If dredging on National forest lands, a Notice of Intent from the Forest Service is required.

Some areas have specific additional restrictions.



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The South Fork of the Merced River has been withdrawn from mineral entry, prohibiting all forms of prospecting and mining activities including metal detectors, panning, sluicing, dry-washing and dredging.

#### **PATENTED CLAIMS**

To obtain U.S. Land Patent to the claim, the claimant must obtain confirmation of the discovery and meet rigorous specific requirements, i.e. a mineral land survey, fees, and required legal procedures. When patent is awarded, a claimant then becomes owner of the **surface** rights along with the mineral rights for the claim.

#### **MINING IN THE MARIPOSA AREA**

Since the Gold Rush days, mining has had a huge influence on the area around Mariposa. Today, visitors notice the influence of the Gold Rush in historic foothill towns and by carefully examining the scenery as they travel.

Since the time of the 49ers, more than \$60 million of gold has been taken from the mines of Mariposa County. Hundreds of mines existed, and some of them are still active. Many of these mines were large operations, mining veins several thousand feet below the surface.

Gold production was a dominant activity in the Mariposa area until the mid-1930s, when the Great Depression reduced gold values.

Operating costs became too high, and few mines were able to remain in business.

Today, few people in the area make their living from mining. Still, the dream of hitting a bonanza has not died. A few mines are worked part-time by hobbyists, and panning or dredging for placer or “free” gold is often done in local streams and rivers.

For more information about mining rules and regulations for federal lands, please contact:

**BLM California State Office**  
2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-1623  
Sacramento, CA 95825-1886  
916-978-4400  
916-978-4416  
TDD 916-978-4419  
[www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov)

**Bureau of Land Management**  
Mother Load Office  
5122 Hillside Circle  
El Dorado Hills, Ca. 95762  
916-941-3101

**Sierra National Forest**  
Bass Lake Ranger District  
57003 Road 225  
North Fork, CA 93643  
559-877-2218  
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