Decision Memo

SURFACE EXPLORATION AND SURFACE DRILLING

2020-2021 Plan of Operations Zarembo Minerals Company, LLC

USDA Forest Service

Tongass National Forest

Wrangell Ranger District

Wrangell, Alaska

BACKGROUND

The USDA Forest Service, Wrangell Ranger District, received a Plan of Operations (POO) from Zarembo Minerals Company LLC on January 13, 2017. The tenure of that Plan of Operations is approximately four years, ending November 2021. **This Decision Memo addresses only one year of that Plan of Operations by Zarembo Minerals for surface exploration and drilling from August 2020 through July 2021, and onsite storage of drilling equipment only during the 2020-2021 winter season.** Plans of Operations for previous years were approved annually in Decision Memos in 2006 through 2019. Those Decision Memos allowed for similar surface exploration, surface drilling, and the onsite storage of drilling equipment during the winter seasons. Since 2006 Zarembo Minerals have drilled only 10 holes to obtain rock core samples. No holes have been drilled since 2008. Exploration activities during August 2020 through July 2021 would be the same as the past years. Activities may include drilling on blocks of claims covered in previous decisions (see Map 1).

Zarembo Minerals Surface Drilling Frenchie Claims Zarembo Island

DECISION

I have decided to continue to authorize Zarembo Minerals' surface exploration activities in the claim blocks identified in the Plan of Operations (see Map 1) from August 2020 through July 2021, and onsite storage of drilling equipment during the 2020-2021 winter season as previously approved. Zarembo Minerals is also approved for motorized use of a closed spur road in the former Frenchie Timber Sale Unit 3 as partial access to their mining claims for exploration activities from August 2020 through July 2021. No cross-country travel by vehicles and/or equipment is approved.

Zarembo Minerals was approved and authorized under a previous POO to conduct the proposed exploration work in 2010 through July 2020. Due to the economic recession and other factors they did not accomplish the work, and are planning to continue the work during 2020 and 2021. These activities are as described in Zarembo Minerals POO, Phases 1, 2 and 3, received January 13, 2017. All requirements and mitigation measures approved in the POO for 2019 remain in effect. A Reclamation Performance Bond will continue to be held by the Forest Service while Zarembo Minerals' equipment and supplies are on National Forest System lands. All lands approved for surface drilling are on National Forest System lands within the mining claims held by Zarembo Minerals Company LLC. No further environmental analysis will be conducted.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as the short-term (1 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. (36 CFR 220.6 Section (e) (8))

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I considered resource conditions identified in agency procedures in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species. A pre-field review for sensitive plants (Biological Evaluation- Botany)) was completed in 2012 and 2016. No R10 Sensitive Plant Species were found. A Biological Evaluation for wildlife was completed in 2015. There are no threatened or endangered wildlife species. Continuing to authorize the Zarembo Minerals exploration will maintain existing levels and use of wildlife habitat. No sensitive species will experience impacts that would cause or contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species. All project activities will be consistent with the National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (5/2007), and the new requirements for Bald Eagles in 50 CFR 22.26 (11/2009).
- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds – There are no municipal watersheds present in the project area. The degree of effect on flood plains and wetlands in the project area will not change with continuing the exploration activities.

- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas – There are no congressionally designated wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas present in the project area.
- Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – There are no inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas in the project area.
- Research natural areas – There are no research natural areas present in the project area.
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites – There are no American Indian or Alaska Native religious or cultural sites in the project area. The Wrangell District Ranger consulted with the Wrangell tribal government for continuation of the plan of operations.
- Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – In 2006 Forest Service archaeologists surveyed the project area and found no historic properties that will be affected by project activities. Current activities continue to have no potential to affect historic properties.

Public Involvement

This action was listed as a proposal on the Tongass National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA), and an electronic mailing of the proposal was sent to a mailing list including people who have subscribed to be informed about this type of project. The Wrangell District Ranger consulted with the Wrangell tribal government for continuation of the occupancy and use. No written or electronic comments/correspondence have been received.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision is consistent with the 2016 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). The surface exploration portions of the project are located within an area identified in the Forest Plan as having a Land Use Designation of Timber Production, Modified Landscape, and Scenic Viewshed. The surface drilling portions of the project are located within an area identified in the Forest Plan as having a Land Use Designation of Timber Production. Timber Production, Modified Landscape and Scenic Viewshed lands are open to mineral entry. Direction for management of these areas includes assuring rights granted under the General Mining Law of 1872, and National Forest Mining Regulations 36 CFR 228. Claim holders are to be permitted reasonable access to mining claims, leases, and material sites and authorized the orderly mineral resource development with the provisions of an approved Plan of Operations in accordance with National Forest Mining Regulations 36 CFR 228 and FSM 2800.

Administrative Review Opportunities

This decision falls within a category of actions which are not subject to administrative review opportunities.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented immediately.

CONTACT

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Clint R Kolarich 7/27/20

CLINT R. KOLARICH Date
District Ranger

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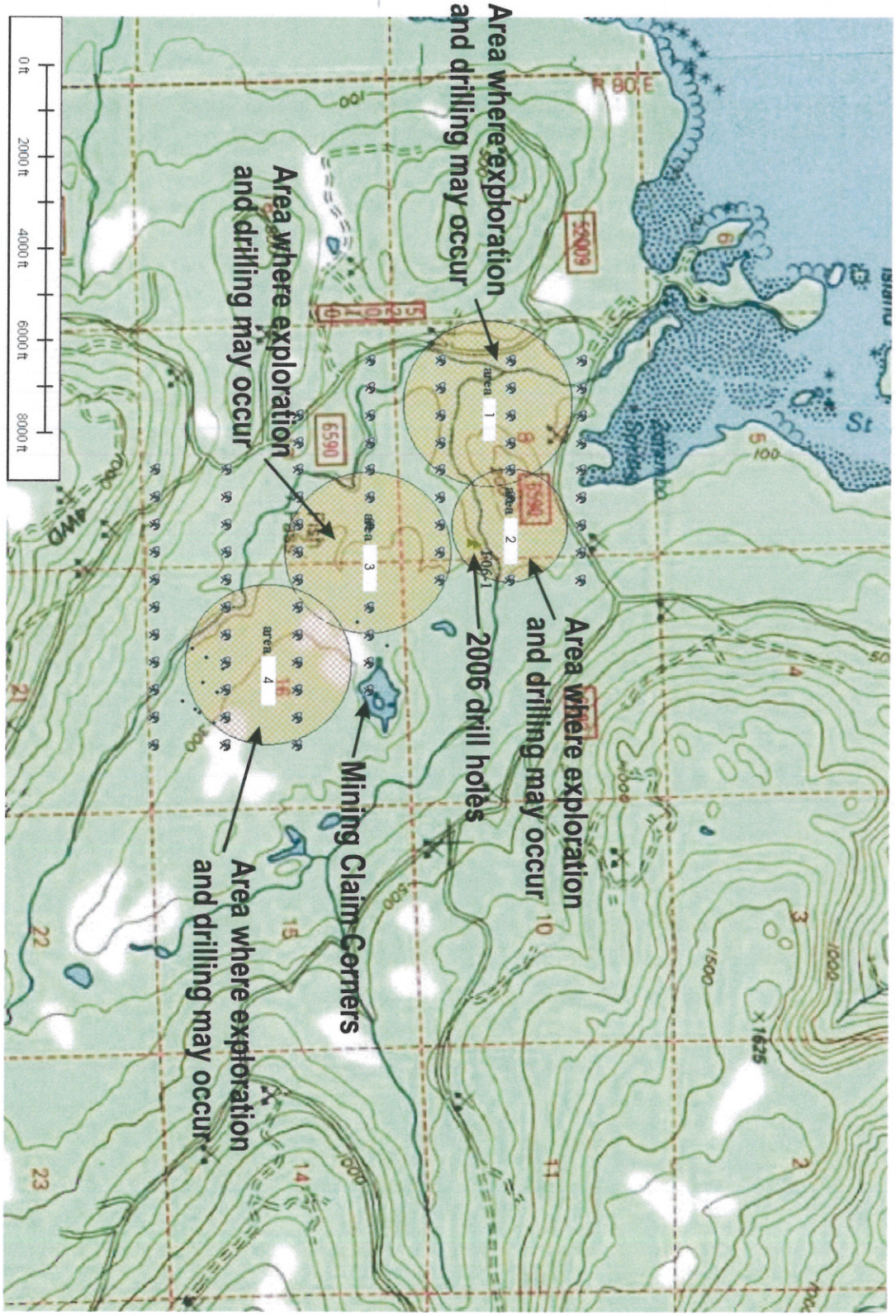
Map 1 – Zarembo Minerals' Claim Blocks and Proposed Drill Sites