



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

# RECREATIONAL MINING ON THE NATIONAL FOREST

Welcome to Central Colorado! The Pike and San Isabel National Forests cover over two million acres, making them two of the largest and most diverse forests of the five-state Rocky Mountain Region. The Pike and San Isabel are popular for their recreational opportunities, offering a variety of ecosystems rich in history, geology, and wildlife habitats. With more than twenty peaks over 14,000 feet, 800 miles of trails, and numerous beautiful scenic areas, the Pike and San Isabel forests are a popular recreation destination.

## Mining History

The Colorado Gold Rush of 1859 sparked a large influx of people into the Rocky Mountain area. By the 1860s, over 10,000 people lived in Park County, making up a third of the population of the Colorado territory. With the sudden boom in mining, small mining camps started to appear throughout the area. Tarryall, Buckskin Joe, and Horseshoe were a few of the camps that sprang up to take advantage of the gold rush. As more prospectors and merchants flooded the area, the mining camps quickly turned into communities, such as Fairplay and Alma, which are still around today. Although the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked a decline in the mining industry, miners still settled in the area for several decades, looking for silver, zinc and lead. Many abandoned adits and historic mill sites can still be found on the mountainsides surrounding Leadville, Fairplay, and Alma; but beware, these sites are dangerous! Although this area has been heavily mined for more than a century, activities such as gold panning and rock hounding still afford visitors an opportunity to get lucky!

**What is recreational mining?** “Recreational Mining” is not a defined Forest Service term, but a popular term in usage by the public.

Operations which are popularly considered to be “recreational mining” are activities conducted by the “weekend” visitor who is pursuing a hobby, such as panning or sluicing using hand tools, to give just two examples. The Forest Service (FS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) regulations provide general guidelines to follow for the protection of the resources.

## Do I need to file a claim?

You do not need to file a mining claim to engage in non-surface disturbing activities, i.e. “recreational mining” on National Forest System Lands. Filing, or “locating” a mining claim establishes an exclusive right to access minerals on a claim. Keep in mind that many mineral deposits have already been “claimed” by other prospectors. Removing any minerals or panning on someone else’s claim without permission is considered trespassing. It is your responsibility to check with the BLM or County for any active mining claims in the area in which you plan to carry out your “recreational mining” activities. Check with the BLM with any further questions you may have about filing mining claims.

Forest Service

Pike and San  
Isabel National  
Forests



## Are all national forest lands available for prospecting?

NO. Some areas *are* excluded. Examples include:

- **ALL** Wilderness Areas
- **ALL** Areas “withdrawn” from mineral entry
- **ALL** Wild and Scenic River Corridors
- *Some* Administrative sites
- *Some* Historical and archaeological sites
- *Some* Campgrounds

## How can I determine if any permit or authorization is required for my mining activities?

The Forest Service does not issue “permits” for mineral-related activities; however, authorization in a plan of operations is needed for some operations. A plan of operations is required for all mining activities that will create a significant disturbance on National Forest System Lands. Gold panning and work with hand tools usually does not require a plan. This is based on the assumption that in most cases significant resource damage will not occur when only hand-held, non-motorized equipment is used. Mineral activities on the National Forest are classified as requiring authorization depending on the level of potential surface disturbance involved. If you are in doubt as to whether you would need a plan of operation, you should submit a Notice of Intent to the District Ranger. Your Notice of Intent should contain enough information for the Ranger to determine whether a plan of operation is needed. It is recommended that you check with the local Ranger District if you have questions concerning the necessity of an authorization.

The following activities will require either a **Notice of Intent** or a **Plan of Operations**:

- **Dredging**: Use of a dredge with an intake nozzle larger than 2” in diameter requires authorization from the Forest Service. If you intend to use a dredge with an intake nozzle of 2” or less, an NOI will be required by the Forest Service. The State of Colorado also issues permits for larger suction dredging activities. You are responsible to obtain any State-required permits for your operations. All dredging activities must remain below the high water mark and cannot impinge on the embankment.
- **Motorized Operations**: Any mechanized or motorized activity requires a “**Plan of Operations**,” which will need to be submitted to the U.S. Forest Service Ranger District for evaluation before you can proceed. Due to the volume of requests, this process can take up to several months, so plan ahead if you wish to operate within a particular season.

## Be AWARE:

- ✓ Make sure you are on public National Forest System land. Within public lands there are considerable portions of private land. Do NOT trespass on private land.
- ✓ “Recreational miners” are only permitted to drive and park on designated system roads and trails. Other access needs would require authorization in a plan of operations.
- ✓ Be aware of Forest Service regulations and special orders for camping, parking, fires, firearms, OHV-use, and areas that may be withdrawn from mineral entry. Know where you are **before** you dig.
- ✓ **STAY AWAY** from abandoned mines. They are unstable and highly dangerous.

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## Where can I go for more information?

The best way to ensure a bright future for prospecting and hand-tool use on public lands is to comply with State and Federal regulations. Start by bringing your questions or concerns to the appropriate agency in the area you plan to work. Remember, any and all sites disturbed during recreational mining must be reclaimed to original condition before leaving the area. **Fill in your holes!**

### South Park Ranger District

P.O. Box 219  
320 Highway 285  
Fairplay, CO 80440  
(719) 836-2031

### Leadville Ranger District

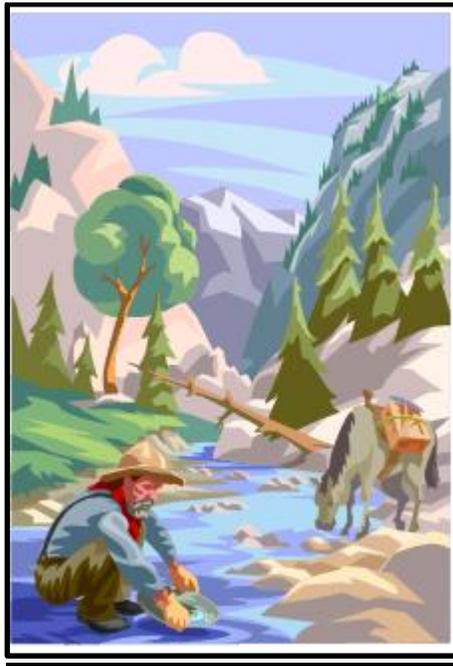
810 Front Street  
Leadville, Co 80461  
(719) 486-0749

### Salida Ranger District

5575 Cleora Road  
Salida, CO 81201  
(719) 539-3591

### South Platte Ranger District

19316 Goddard Ranch Court  
Morrison, CO 80465  
303) 275-5610



**PLEASE CONTACT YOUR LOCAL FOREST SERVICE RANGER DISTRICT IN ORDER TO ACQUIRE THE PROPER DOCUMENTATION TO PROCEED.**