

Environmental Assessment

for the

Proposed

Crystal Park Mineral Withdrawal Addition



MAY 22, 2007

Dillon Ranger District

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I - PROJECT SCOPE	3
Introduction.....	3
Location	3
Purpose and Need	3
Decision to be Made	3
Issues.....	4
Further National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) Analysis Needed.....	4
CHAPTER II - ALTERNATIVES	4
Alternative Development	4
Alternatives Considered in Detail.....	4
CHAPTER III - AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT	5
Recreation	5
Minerals	5
CHAPTER IV – EFFECTS	7
Introduction.....	7
Definitions (From Council on Environmental Quality regulations).....	7
Recreation	7
Minerals	8
Plants – Proposed, Endangered, Threatened and Sensitive Plant Species.....	8
Wildlife	9
Hydrology	9
Soils.....	9
Aquatic Species.....	10
Heritage Resources, Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs) and Traditional Use Areas (TUAs)	10
Consistency with NFMA and Other Laws.....	10
CHAPTER V-CONSULTATION WITH OTHERS	11
Scoping	11

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CHAPTER I - PROJECT SCOPE

Introduction

The USDA, Forest Service proposes to apply to the Secretary of the Interior through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for withdrawal of 390 additional acres adjacent to the Crystal Park Area. These acres would be withdrawn from location and entry under the United States mining laws, subject to valid existing rights. The land would remain open to the mineral leasing laws.

The area proposed for withdrawal was subject to temporary segregation from location and entry under the mining laws for 2 years, ending April 11, 2006.

This area has unique geological, recreational, and historic values and presents significant interpretive opportunities that need to be protected. The area is considered by the U.S. Geological Survey to be favorable for porphyry molybdenum deposits, and has been explored in the past by mining companies. Reportedly, molybdenum mineralization was encountered, but not in economic concentrations.

The proposed additional acres adjoin an existing withdrawal area of 220 acres called Crystal Park.

Location

The Crystal Park area is about 29 air miles northwest of Dillon, Montana, in the south central Pioneer Mountains. The Wise River – Polaris National Scenic Byway provides access. The area is comprised of rounded, Granitic ridges sparsely forested with lodgepole pine, surrounded by open grassy meadows. Background views from Crystal Park are dominated by extensive, forested hills and mountains, and higher, rocky peaks. Elevation at Crystal Park ranges from 7600 to 7800 feet.

The proposed mineral withdrawal area is located approximately (see Figure 1) in Township 4 South, Range 12 West. See Chapter II for legal description of the mineral withdrawal area.

Purpose and Need

The **purpose** for action is to help fulfill the Beaverhead National Forest Plan goal of providing a spectrum of recreation opportunities to meet the expected recreational demands and develop the recreational opportunities that can best be provided on the Beaverhead Deerlodge National Forest.

The addition of this land parcel to the existing Crystal Park withdrawal is **needed** to include more crystal-bearing lands and extend the life of the Crystal Park Recreation Area. This would preserve the unique resource of quartz crystals for the general public's enjoyment at the Crystal Park Recreation Area, and maintain the opportunity for recreational crystal collecting.

Since 1993, Crystal Park has been managed for recreational crystal digging by the Forest Service in cooperation with the Butte Mineral & Gem Club. The original withdrawal was thought to be adequate to provide opportunities for the public through the year 2020. However, the popularity of the area has increased dramatically, and additional resources will be needed in order to continue to provide quality opportunities for crystal hunters. Future inclusion of these lands to the existing Crystal Park recreational crystal digging area will help to extend maintenance and regulated activity into an area that is presently experiencing disturbance by crystal hunters outside of any developed plan.

This withdrawal would further protect public access in the Crystal Park area by excluding new privately-held mining claims and dedicate the additional area to recreational use, subject to valid existing rights. Plans for mineral operations in the withdrawn area would not be accepted, other than from any claimants with valid existing rights.

Decision to be Made

Section 204 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA, 43 U.S.C. 1714) gives the

Secretary of Interior general authority to make, modify, extend, or revoke most withdrawals on public land systems. The Forest Service must apply to the Secretary of the Interior through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for withdrawal actions on the National Forest. The Forest Service will decide whether or not to apply for formal withdrawal of the Crystal Park Area to the BLM, and if so, which alternative to propose. The Regional Forester, Northern Region, has the authority to make this decision for recommendation.

Issues

The issues identified through consultation with others (see Chapter IV) for this proposed project are:

1. Recreation
2. Minerals: - These acres would be withdrawn from location and entry under the United States mining laws, subject to valid existing rights. The land would remain open to the mineral leasing laws.

Further National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) Analysis Needed

Any future management proposals for the area would be subject to NEPA analysis and may be tiered to this EA (40 CFR 1508.28). Tiering means that, if needed, future environmental documents for those projects could be supported by analysis documented in this EA.

CHAPTER II - ALTERNATIVES

Alternative Development

Two alternatives were identified, No Action and Withdrawal. These alternatives are described below.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Alternative A – No Action

This alternative is the no action alternative as required by NEPA regulations. Selection of this alternative would mean the proposed withdrawal would not be considered at this time. A no action alternative leaves the area open for location and entry under the United States mining laws to be administered by the Forest Service under the 36 CFR 228 regulations.

Table 1: Legal description of existing withdrawal

T.4S., R.12W., Principal Meridian Montana				
County	Section	Legal Description	Acres	
Beaverhead	16	W ¹ / ₂ SW ¹ / ₂ NW ¹ / ₄	20	
		SE ¹ / ₄ SW ¹ / ₄ NW ¹ / ₄	10	
		NW ¹ / ₄ SW ¹ / ₄	40	
		N ¹ / ₂ SW ¹ / ₄ SW ¹ / ₄	20	
	17	SE ¹ / ₄ SW ¹ / ₄ NE ¹ / ₄	10	
		SE ¹ / ₄ NE ¹ / ₄	40	
		NE ¹ / ₄ SE ¹ / ₄	40	
		E ¹ / ₂ NW ¹ / ₄ SE ¹ / ₄	20	
		N ¹ / ₂ SE ¹ / ₄ SE ¹ / ₄	20	
		Total Acreage		220

Alternative B – Proposed Action

This alternative proposes the withdrawal of 390 acres of National Forest System land from location and entry under the United States mining laws as identified in the temporary segregation and subject to existing rights. This withdrawal would not affect any other activity. See Appendix A for a map of the proposed mineral withdrawal area location.

Table 2: Legal description of proposed withdrawal addition

T.4S., R.12W., Principal Meridian Montana			
County	Section	Legal Description	Acres
Beaverhead	8	E½SE¼	80
	9	SW¼	160
	16	N½NW¼	80
		NE¼SW¼NW¼	10
		N½SW¼NW¼	20
	17	NE¼NE¼	40
Total Acreage			390

CHAPTER III - AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

This Chapter describes the existing environment within the analysis area that would be affected by the additional withdrawal.

The existing Crystal Park Recreational Mineral Collection Area is located in an area formerly held by unpatented mining claims of the Butte Mineral & Gem Club. The club originally located and maintained the claims expressly for quartz crystal collecting by the public. Through cooperation between the Forest Service and the Butte Mineral and Gem Club, the area was withdrawn from mineral entry and the club's claims were dropped. On March 2, 1993 Public Land Order (PLO) 6958 was published in the Federal Register, Serial Number MTM 79374. PLO 6958, effective March 2, 1993 withdrew 220 acres of Forest Service land for the Crystal Park Recreational Mineral Collection Area. Since then, the Forest Service and Butte Mineral & Gem Club have worked together under cooperative agreements to facilitate recreational use of Crystal Park. The Forest Service has invested more than \$160,000 in capital improvements at Crystal Park.

Recreation

Crystal Park lies along the Wise River – Polaris Road, which was designated a National Scenic Byway in 1989. This designation recognizes the area's outstanding aesthetic, cultural, historic, and interpretive values, as well as a wide array of developed and dispersed recreation opportunities. Development of new recreation facilities and improvement of existing trailheads and campgrounds has been underway along the Byway since 1989.

In 1991, the Byway was paved from the Wise River – Grasshopper Creek Divide north to Highway 43 at Wise River. At the end of 2006 the remaining paving of the Scenic Byway was completed. Paved access increases use in the area in general, including Crystal Park. Crystal Park is about 65 miles on paved roads from Butte, Montana, a city of about 10,000 people, and just 39 miles off Interstate 15.

Facilities at Crystal Park are designed to accommodate 120 persons at one time, with paved parking for 47 vehicles. Constructed to accommodate handicapped people, the recreation site includes a paved loop trail and vista point, three vault toilets, interpretive signs and bulletin boards, a camp site for a host, hand pump water well three picnic sites with tables and fire grates, and digging area boundary fence.

Prior to improvement of the Byway and construction of new facilities, visitor use at Crystal Park was estimated in 1988 at 3300 visitor days between July 1 and September 1. This estimate was made by counting vehicles in the parking lots and estimating the number of visitors per vehicle based on reports by a volunteer host. In 2006 visitation has increased to over 8000 visitors and with the completion of the Byway paving, use is expected to expand.

Minerals

Geology

The Pioneer Mountains consist mainly of strongly folded and faulted sedimentary rocks of Precambrian to

Cretaceous age. Intruding these older rocks, the late Cretaceous/early Paleocene Pioneer batholith crops out in the eastern part of the Pioneer Mountains, about 4 miles east of Crystal Park. Rocks of the Pioneer batholith are dominantly biotite-hornblende granodiorite and biotite granite. Minor leucocratic rocks include small bodies of pegmatite, alaskite, and hypabyssal quartz-feldspar porphyry with aphanitic to fine-grained groundmass.

Crystal Park is in a broad area of low relief and generally poor bedrock exposure between high, rugged, glaciated peaks of the batholith on the east and lower, rounded, forested mountains to the west. The existing and proposed withdrawals lie on low ridges, where hydrothermally altered rocks crop out.

The country rock in this area, largely granodiorite, was intensely and almost completely converted to rather coarsely crystalline muscovite and quartz, leaving only a few remnant masses of unaltered granodiorite scattered among the altered rocks. The contact between zones of altered and unaltered rock is weathered to grus, and to rounded, case-hardened, boulder-like masses, in which weak alteration may be difficult to recognize.

The soil is deeply leached and oxidized, 3-12 feet deep or more, in which the most resistant fragments are intergrown, coarsely crystalline muscovite and quartz in porous, vuggy aggregates. Muscovite is in irregular plates, sheaves, and rosettes up to one-half inch in diameter. Most muscovite is stained light yellowish-brown or medium brown by iron oxides, though some is white to pale green. Quartz crystals are typically less than one inch in diameter and up to one and one-half inch long. They form singly-terminated crystals and anhedral aggregates. Most quartz is in irregular veins or disseminated in muscovite.

Robert C. Pearson and Byron R. Berger of the U.S. Geological Survey, in Open File Report 80-706 (1980), evaluated the geology and geochemistry of some hydrothermally altered rocks in the Pioneer Mountains, including the vicinity of Crystal Park. Many soil samples from the withdrawal area contained anomalous amounts of silver (up to 2 ppm), molybdenum (10-30 ppm), arsenic (10-20 ppm), and zinc (100-180 ppm). Brassy pyrite and molybdenite were found intergrown with massive muscovite and minor quartz on the dump of a prospect pit in the southeastern corner of the proposed withdrawal, about 230 yards north-northwest of the 7,999-ft. hilltop just south of Crystal Park.

Mining Activity

Quartz crystals found at Crystal Park have attracted growing numbers of recreationists and some commercial interest over the past 30 years. In 1969, the Butte Miner & Gem Club approached the Forest Service, requesting the area be reserved for public use. To exclude competing, commercial interests, the Club located lode and placer claims at Crystal Park. These claims encumber the existing withdrawal area.

The Forest Service has not required the Club to operate under regulations governing mineral operations on National Forests. Instead, the Club and the Forest Service entered cooperative agreements to provide facilities such as toilets, parking area, picnic sites, fencing, and signs for visitors. In 1988, an estimated 3300 visitor-days were recorded by Butte Mineral & Gem Club hosts at Crystal Park during July, August, and September.

In 1990, the Butte Mineral & Gem Club did not file evidence of assessment, and those claims were declared abandoned. By the time claims were relocated in 1991, the area had been open to new mining claims for several months. Concern that a public recreation opportunity might be lost due to an oversight in timely filing of documents to maintain mining claims led the Forest Service to request withdrawal, with support of the Club.

Mike and Sandra Sprunger of Leamington, Utah, located lode claims in the area in 1987 and 1988. Mr. and Mrs. Sprunger own a mineral specimen business, and sell quartz crystals and other minerals to collectors worldwide. When operations by the Sprungers were approved by the Forest Service, the Butte Mineral & Gem Club objected, but did not take legal action. Prior to a mineral examination in July 1991, Mr. and Mrs. Sprunger relinquished almost all their claims within the proposed withdrawal area, reserving 1.38 acres of Lucky #8 Lode. This 1.38 acres encumbers the extreme southeast corner of the existing withdrawal, but has little effect on the area as a whole.

Two mining companies have studied the Crystal Park area for possible molybdenum deposits since 1980. Utah International Inc. located the "Moose" claim group in 1980, and conducted exploratory drilling. This claim block

covered an area including the present withdrawal proposal. The Moose claims were abandoned in 1983. Cominco American Resources located the “Moly Brown” claims in the Price Creek area, south of the existing withdrawal, in 1978. After some exploratory drilling, Cominco abandoned these claims in 1983.

Mineral Potential

The presence of sulfide minerals (pyrite, molybdenite, and arsenopyrite) in the area indicate potential metaliferous deposits. The Elkhorn Mining District, a mile or two east of Crystal Park, produced mainly silver, copper and lead from quartz veins in the Pioneer batholith during the 1920’s. Although molybdenum was the focus of exploration around Crystal Park in the early 1980’s, prospects for molybdenum and other metals have not been thoroughly evaluated.

Most of the quartz crystals found at Crystal Park have no value except personal, because of marginal quality. Though they seem abundant, there is no way to accurately predict the quality or quantity of quartz crystals at Crystal Park, or determine their potential value. This unpredictability limits economic viability of commercial quartz operations. A commercial quartz venture at this site would be highly speculative.

Oil and gas potential is considered low based on the structural complexity of the area and the presence of igneous rocks.

CHAPTER IV – EFFECTS

Effects include both direct and indirect impacts. Cumulative impacts, those that result from other past, present or reasonably foreseeable future actions, are also described.

Introduction

This chapter discloses the environmental consequences of implementing the alternatives. The description of existing conditions in Chapter III provides the baseline for describing consequences, and a comparison of alternatives is provided in Chapter II. This chapter focuses on three significant issues, describing direct and indirect effects of the alternatives on recreation, minerals and the local economy. Cumulative or combined effects of the alternatives, considering past actions and reasonably foreseeable actions are also discussed.

Definitions (From Council on Environmental Quality regulations)

Direct effects are those which are caused by the action and occur at the same time and place.

Indirect effects are those which are caused by the action and are later in time or farther removed in distance, but still reasonably foreseeable.

Cumulative effects are the impacts on the environment which result from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what can result from relatively minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.

Recreation

Alternative A: No Action

Direct Effects – No action would have no immediate, direct effect on recreation at Crystal Park.

Indirect Effects – No action would result in instability and possible loss of increased recreation opportunity at Crystal Park.

Cumulative effects – No cumulative effects would result from no action.

Alternative B: Withdrawal

Direct Effects – As no ground disturbance, vegetative change, or additional recreational use is proposed, withdrawal would have no immediate, direct effects on recreation at Crystal Park.

Indirect Effects – In the long term withdrawal would enhance the recreational stability and increase the potential opportunity for expanded recreational digging at Crystal Park. However, no plans are currently proposed for this activity.

Cumulative Effects – In combination with development of recreation facilities along the Wise River-Polaris Scenic Byway and completion of highway paving, withdrawal will contribute to cumulative enhancement of recreation opportunities in this area of Beaverhead County. There will be no change in the current Forest Plan management delineations nor in any Forest Plan revision. There will be no change in roadless, Wilderness, or proposed Wilderness delineated area.

Minerals

Alternative A: No Action

Direct Effects – No action would have no immediate, direct effect on mineral resources. The 390 acres of National Forest System Lands would remain open to mineral entry.

Indirect Effects – No action would have no indirect effect on mineral resources. New mining claims could be located in the area, and new claimants could explore, develop and produce minerals in the area.

Cumulative Effects – No action would have no known cumulative effect of mineral resources.

Alternative B: Withdrawal

Direct Effects – Withdrawal would close 390 additional acres of National Forest System lands to mineral entry, subject to valid existing rights. Only claimants with valid existing rights could explore, develop and produce minerals within the withdrawn area.

Indirect Effects – No new mining claims could be established in the withdrawn area, and failure of any present claimant with valid existing rights to file evidence of annual assessment work would result in their claim(s) being declared abandoned.

Cumulative Effects – Withdrawal would have no known cumulative effects on mineral resources. However, further operating costs for mineral operations in the general area would increase along with recreation use, as discussed for Local Economy cumulative effects below.

Plants – Proposed, Endangered, Threatened and Sensitive Plant Species

Alternative A: No Action

Direct Effects – No action would have no immediate, direct effect on Region 1 sensitive plant species or potential habitat.

Indirect Effects – No action would have no known indirect effects on Region 1 sensitive plant species or potential habitat..

Cumulative Effects – No action would have no known cumulative impacts on Region 1 sensitive plant species or potential habitat.

Alternative B: Withdrawal

Direct Effects – Withdrawal would have no immediate, direct effect or cause a loss of viability or trend to federal listing of any Region 1 sensitive plant species or potential habitat.

Indirect Effects – Withdrawal would have no indirect effects or cause a loss of viability or trend to federal listing of any Region 1 sensitive plant species or potential habitat.

Cumulative Effects –Withdrawal would have no cumulative effects or cause a loss of viability or trend to federal listing of any Region 1 sensitive plant species or potential habitat.

Wildlife

Alternative A: No Action

Direct Effects – No action would have no immediate, direct effect on Region 1 sensitive species (TEPS) and/or potentially suitable habitat or Management Indicator Species (MIS) identified in the Forest Plan (USDA 1986).

Indirect Effects – There would be no indirect effects on Region 1 sensitive species (TEPS) and/or potentially suitable habitat or Management Indicator Species (MIS) identified in the Forest Plan (USDA 1986).

Cumulative Effects – No action would have no known cumulative impacts on Region 1 sensitive species (TEPS) and/or potentially suitable habitat or Management Indicator Species (MIS) identified in the Forest Plan (USDA 1986).

Alternative B: Withdrawal

Direct Effects – Withdrawal would have no immediate, direct effect on Region 1 sensitive species (TEPS) and/or potentially suitable habitat or Management Indicator Species (MIS) identified in the Forest Plan (USDA 1986).

Indirect Effects – Withdrawal would have no indirect effects on Region 1 sensitive species (TEPS) and/or potentially suitable habitat or Management Indicator Species (MIS) identified in the Forest Plan (USDA 1986).

Cumulative Effects –Withdrawal would have no cumulative effects on Region 1 sensitive species (TEPS) and/or potentially suitable habitat or Management Indicator Species (MIS) identified in the Forest Plan (USDA 1986).

Hydrology

Alternative A: No Action

Direct Effects – There will be no direct effects to hydrology with the no action alternative. There will be no change to the existing condition with this alternative.

Indirect Effects – There will be no indirect effects to hydrology with the no action alternative. There will be no change to the existing condition with this alternative.

Cumulative Effects – There will be no cumulative effects to hydrology from the no action alternative.

Alternative B: Withdrawal

Direct Effects – There will be no direct effects to hydrology with the proposed action alternative. There will be no change to the existing condition with the proposed action alternative.

Indirect Effects – There will be no indirect effects to hydrology with the proposed action alternative. There will be no change to the existing condition with the proposed action alternative.

Cumulative Effects – There will be no cumulative effects to hydrology from the proposed action alternative.

Soils

Alternative A: No Action

Direct Effects – There will be no direct effects to soils with the no action alternative. There will be no change to the existing condition with this alternative.

Indirect Effects – There will be no indirect effects to soils with the no action alternative. There will be no change to the existing condition with this alternative.

Cumulative Effects – There will be no cumulative effects to soils from the no action alternative.

Alternative B: Withdrawal

Direct Effects – There will be no direct effects to soils with the proposed action alternative. There will be no change to the existing condition with the proposed action alternative.

Indirect Effects – There will be no indirect effects to soils with the proposed action alternative. There will be no

change to the existing condition with the proposed action alternative.

Cumulative Effects – There will be no cumulative effects to soils from the proposed action alternative.

Aquatic Species

Alternative A: No Action

Direct Effects – There will be no direct effects to aquatic species with the no action alternative. There will be no change to the existing condition with this alternative.

Indirect Effects – There will be no indirect effects to aquatic species with the no action alternative. There will be no change to the existing condition with this alternative.

Cumulative Effects – There will be no cumulative effects to aquatic species from the no action alternative.

Alternative B: Withdrawal

Direct Effects – There will be no direct effects to aquatic species with the proposed action alternative. There will be no change to the existing condition with the proposed action alternative.

Indirect Effects – There will be no indirect effects to aquatic species with the proposed action alternative. There will be no change to the existing condition with the proposed action alternative.

Cumulative Effects – There will be no cumulative effects to aquatic species from the proposed action alternative.

Heritage Resources, Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs) and Traditional Use Areas (TUAs)

Alternative A: No Action

Direct Effects – No action would have no immediate, direct effect on significant Heritage Resources, TCPs or TUAs.

Indirect Effects – No action would have no known effects on significant Heritage Resources, TCPs or TUAs.

Cumulative Effects – No action would have no known cumulative impacts on significant Heritage Resources, TCPs or TUAs.

Alternative B: Withdrawal

Direct Effects – Withdrawal would have no immediate, direct effect on significant Heritage Resources, TCPs or TUAs.

Indirect Effects – Withdrawal would have no known indirect effects on significant Heritage Resources, TCPs or TUAs.

Cumulative Effects – Withdrawal would have no cumulative effects on significant Heritage Resources, TCPs or TUAs

Consistency with NFMA and Other Laws

The proposed action and alternatives comply with or are consistent with all applicable laws including, but not limited to, the following:

Clean Water Act

Compliance with the Clean Water Act will be ensured under the Forest Service surface management regulations.

Endangered Species Act

A biological evaluation was conducted for the project. The two action alternatives were generally expected to result in reduced levels of direct disturbance as well as less impact to TES species habitat.

National Forest Management Act

The proposed action is consistent with the Beaverhead National Forest Plan and Management Prescriptions for

Management Areas 14, 16 and 18.

National Historic Preservation Act

Compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act and all other applicable laws and regulations will be ensured by adhering to a Memorandum of Agreement between the Forest Service and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer, continuing to consult with potentially affected Tribe(s), and/or development of a management plan for the area in the future.

CHAPTER V-CONSULTATION WITH OTHERS

Scoping

On February 23, 2007, a scoping letter was sent to 538 individuals or groups to solicit comments regarding this addition to the Crystal Park mineral withdrawal area.

We received 13 responses to the scoping letter. Eight of these were supportive, an additional 4 were also supportive but had additional questions, and the remaining 1 was neutral since withdrawal would be an administrative action and would not have any environmental effects.

Following are questions or comments from the 3 with additional questions:

1. There were 2 requests for more specific location information: *Included in this draft EA is a map and legal description.*

2. There was a 4 part request:

Part a) pre-existing claims be honored and claimants be allowed to pursue development of their claims.

As stated in the introduction, the withdrawal would be subject to valid existing rights.

Part b) there is no higher use of this land i.e. precious and base metal potential within the proposed withdrawal addition.

According to the Crystal Park Mineral Potential Report, there is a medium locatable mineral potential, low leasable mineral potential, and high saleable mineral potential (crystals).

Part c) determination of the higher use be made by a well-experienced mineral appraiser

The referenced mineral potential report was prepared by the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Geologist and reviewed for technical content by the Certified Review Mineral Examiner for Region 1.

Part d) no buffer zones, actual or administrative against other uses, especially mineral development, be placed around the resulting Crystal Park area.

No additional areas or zones outside the proposed withdrawal boundaries are being proposed or analyzed.

3. There was a request that existing claims be honored: *As stated in the introduction, the withdrawal would be subject to valid existing rights.*