

### 33. Mining and Minerals Exploration

**Goals:** Provide for environmentally sound mineral exploration, development, and reclamation in areas open to mineral entry and in areas with valid existing rights that are otherwise closed to mineral entry. Seek withdrawal from mineral entry of specific locations where mineral development may not meet land use designation objectives. Maintain inventory of surficial geology, geomorphic features, geologic hazards and paleontological resources.

**Objective:** Implement the Minerals and Geology Standards and Guidelines.

**Background:** A wide range of mineral resources and deposit types occur within the boundaries of the Tongass National Forest. Examples include, but are not limited to, gold, silver, molybdenum, and uranium, as well as nationally designated “strategic” and “critical” minerals such as lead, zinc, copper, tungsten, and rare earth elements. The Forest Service recognizes that minerals are fundamental to the nation’s wellbeing and, as policy, encourages the orderly exploration and development of the mineral resources on National Forest System lands. The Secretary of Agriculture has provided regulations (36 CFR 228) to ensure surface resource protection during the exploration and development of the mineral resources.

**Mining and Minerals Exploration Question:** *Are federal regulations (36 CFR 228) to ensure surface resource protection implemented and is the administration of this regulation through the Forest Plan effective in limiting soil and water resource impacts?*

#### Evaluation Criteria

The Forest Service is engaged in an on-going effort to mitigate the dangers posed by abandoned mine land (AML) features on the National Forests. These features include tunnels, adits, shafts, tailings ponds, rock dumps, mill sites and other associated mining features. FY2014 inspections of mineral sites indicate that the effects of mining activities on surface resources are consistent with Forest Plan expectations.

#### Monitoring Results

The Forest Service administered two large locatable mine plans (Greens Creek and Kensington Gold Mine) in FY2014 and processed several dozen exploration-drilling programs and mineral material operations (Herbert Glacier Project, Bokan Project, Woewoedski Island Project, Zarembo Island Project, among others).

#### Evaluation of Results

Inspections of mineral sites indicate that the effects of mining activities on surface resources are consistent with Forest Plan expectations. The necessity of the operator to obtain approval for their Plan of Operations provides the Forest Service the opportunity and authority to control the effects of the development on the Forest surface resources.