



**File Code:** 2810

**Date:** February 18, 2009

Dear Interested Party,

The Pintler Ranger District is initiating this scoping statement to provide a starting point for public input. The District will evaluate the impacts and determine mitigation measures for sapphire mining proposed in the **Little Moffat Placer Mine project**.

### **Purpose and Need**

Gail McIntyre of Philipsburg, Montana has submitted a Plan of Operations (POO) to placer mine sapphires on unpatented mining claims located in T6N, R16W, sections 22 and 27, in the Little Moffat Gulch drainage approximately 15 miles southwest of Philipsburg(see attached map). Ms. McIntire proposes to placer mine an area approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an acre.

The role of the Forest Service is to ensure that mining activities minimize adverse environmental effects on National Forest System resources and comply with all applicable environmental laws. Congress has not given the Forest Service authority to unreasonably circumscribe or prohibit reasonably necessary activities under the 1872 General Mining Law that are otherwise lawful.

The proposed mineral exploration is located within Management Area D2 of the 1987 Deerlodge National Forest Plan. The goals described for management area D2 are to provide a balanced amount of livestock forage and big game habitat. Designate forage production from range and wildlife improvement investments for both livestock and wildlife (pg III-52).

Mineral-related operations within Management Area D2 will be according to approved operating plans. Conditions and stipulations will maintain forage production to the extent practical.

All access requests will be based on logical need based on existing stage of exploration and development. Access will be coordinated with transportation plans and be allowed on a case-by-case basis. Final reclamation of all roads not needed for future management will be to near-natural conditions.

### **Proposed Action**

Ms. McIntire proposes to placer mine an area approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an acre in Little Moffat Gulch. The area would be divided into 5 panels. Each panel would be approximately 20 feet wide and the length would vary from 120 feet to 480 feet due to the shape of the draw bottom, down to bedrock. Little Moffat Gulch has a small, non fish bearing intermittent stream that would need to be diverted around the project area until the completion of the mining project. This would allow the mine area to dry out so excavation could proceed without creating problems with mud due to saturated soils. The water would also be used to fill the production pond used in processing the sapphire bearing gravels. The stream would be diverted around the area by constructing an



earthen diversion dam approximately 2 feet wide, 2 feet tall and 30 feet long across the draw bottom. The water would then enter a diversion ditch through a hole in the dam. The constructed diversion ditch would be approximately 2 feet wide, 1/2 foot deep and 880 feet long extending into Big Moffat Gulch. The end of the ditch would circle back for a short distance with multiple discharge points to disperse any water velocity and sedimentation prior to entering the vegetative filter in the wetlands. Water used in the operation would be pumped from the production pond. The pond is U shaped with the approximate dimensions of 20 feet wide, 240 feet long and 15 feet deep. Water pumped into the wash plant is used to clean the gravels. The wash plant consists of a trommel that is a combination of a screen and scrubbing unit, conveyor and sluice box. Pay gravels are placed in the trommel where they are washed with water while the trommel spins like a cement mixer. The screen in the trommel separates the material into desired sizes that are then further processed as they pass through the sluice box. The resulting concentrates will then be removed for further processing.

Excavating the panels would be accomplished with a rubber tired backhoe. The topsoil (6-8 inches of growth medium) from panels 1 and 2 would be stripped, stockpiled on the east edge of panel 1 and seeded. The placer gravels would then be excavated from the panels in 40-ft segments. The placer gravel from panel 1 would be stockpiled on panel 2. From the stockpile, the placer gravel will be processed in the wash plant and the waste rock and fines would be returned back into the hole it came from.

After panel 1 is completed it will be re-contoured and the topsoil from panel 3 would be stripped and stockpiled to the west. When panel 2 is completed and re-contoured, topsoil will be spread on panel 1 and seeded. This sequence will repeat for each subsequent panel 3, 4 and 5. When the last panel 5 is completed, the topsoil would be pushed over the re-contoured surface and seeded.

Production is not expected to exceed 200 loose cubic yards per day however the mining will occur seasonally on an intermittent basis, weekends, vacations and holidays. The project is expected to take 5 years to complete.

Access would be by existing road #5002. This road is within an area closure to motorized use from September 1 through June 15 for Hunting Recreation Opportunities, Big Game Winter Range, and Elk Calving. These closure dates would restrict her time of operations to 2 1/2 months a year. Ms McIntyre is requesting access to her operation beginning in April and ending in December or when winter weather stops placer operations due to freezing water and access problems.

### **Decision to be Made**

As the Pintler District Ranger, I will decide whether or not to approve the proposed action as submitted or with changes and/or mitigating measures developed in response to specific resource issues and public scoping. Based upon our current knowledge of this project an environmental assessment will be prepared.

### **How to Get Involved**

This is your first opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis for this project. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires that the potential effects of Federal

actions and alternatives to those actions be disclosed to the public. All interested parties have an opportunity and are encouraged to participate in the process. We ask that you submit your comments in writing to assist in issue and alternative development. Issues identified during scoping will be used to develop alternatives to the proposed action. Please provide specific rationale for your comments and opinions to assist us in the analysis for the project.

Comments regarding this project should be submitted to:

District Ranger  
Pintler Ranger District  
88 Business Loop  
Philipsburg, MT 59858  
Telephone 406-859-3211 **FAX** 406-859-3689  
Email: [skelley@fs.fed.us](mailto:skelley@fs.fed.us) subject: **Little Moffat Placer Mine**

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person can request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 15 days.

To ensure your comments will be included in this analysis, comments should be postmarked by **March 20, 2009**. Persons not responding to this mailing will not receive further information regarding this project. If you wish to participate in this environmental analysis or be kept informed of the process but are unable to respond to this scoping document, please contact **Steve Kelley, Project Lead**, at the Email address above or phone 406-494-0222.

Sincerely,

*/s/ CF Bucha Gentry*  
CHARLENE F. BUCHA GENTRY  
District Ranger

Enclosure