

Appeal Procedures
 Stillwater Mining Company's Blitz
 Ridge - 2012 Surface Exploration
 Drilling Plan of Operations for Mineral
 Exploration
 USDA - FOREST SERVICE
 Custer National Forest
 Beartooth Ranger District
 Stillwater County, Montana

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/custer/andmanagement/projects>

For additional information about this proposed action, contact: Dan Seifert at the Custer National Forest, 6811 US Highway 212 South, Red Lodge, MT, 59068; Telephone: 406-446-2103.

April 9, 2012

The Forest Service, Custer National Forest, Beartooth Ranger District is proposing to authorize a mineral exploration project proposed on National Forest System lands in the Benbow area of the Beartooth Mountains. The legal description for proposed exploratory drill sites is T5S, R16E, Sections 19, 20, 29, 30 and T5S, R15E, Section 24.

The purpose for action is Stillwater Mining Company's February 2012 submission of the Blitz Ridge - 2012 Surface Exploration Drilling Plan of Operations for Mineral Exploration (referred to hereafter as Plan of Operations). The need for action is the Forest Service's responsibility to approve or require modifications to the Plan of Operations in accordance with Federal mining and environmental law. Stillwater Mining Company (SMC) has proposed to use National Forest System lands in connection with operations authorized by the United States Mining laws (30 USC 21-54) which confer a statutory right to enter public lands to search for minerals. In accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) at Title 36, Part 228a, the Forest Service is required to analyze the Plan of Operations in determining the reasonableness of requirements for surface resource protection.

SMC submitted a Plan of Operations proposing exploratory core drilling at six drill sites with up to five separate drill holes at each location. Each drill site would require use of a water drafting site in adjacent drainages. Up to two drill locations would be operated concurrently. Drill equipment would be mobilized using helicopters and existing roads. Operations would occur 24 hours per day, 7 days a week, requiring up to 10 persons working in the area. SMC proposes to begin work upon approval of this Plan of Operations for one year, with no drilling occurring from approximately November to June due to winter conditions. All disturbed areas would be reclaimed upon completion of exploration work. Maximum disturbance at six proposed drillsites would total about 0.4 acres. A complete description of the proposed action and related environmental information is available upon request or on the Custer National Forest website at:

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments will be accepted for 30 calendar days following publication of this notice in the Billings Gazette, which is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this proposal. Only those who submit comments during the 30-day comment period will be eligible to appeal the project. For appeal eligibility each individual or representative from each organization submitting substantive comments must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request. Comments received, including the names, addresses, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and be available for public inspection.

This proposed action is subject to notice, comment and appeal regulations (36 CFR 215) as a result of the March 19, 2012, judicial ruling in Sequoia ForestKeeper v. Tidwell. In that ruling, the U.S. District Court, Eastern District of California found that Forest Service regulations exempting project decisions from notice, comment, and appeal when categorically excluded from further analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act are in violation of the Appeals Reform Act and enjoined the Forest Service from following these regulations. The 36 CFR 215 notice, comment, and appeal procedures are posted on the Internet at http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/textidx?c=ecfr&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title36/36cfr215_main_02.tpl.

Written, hand-delivered, or oral comments must be submitted to the Responsible Official: Traute Parrie, District Ranger, Custer National Forest, 6811 US Highway 212 South, Red Lodge, MT 59068, phone (406) 446-2103, fax (406) 446-3918. Office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered or oral comments are: 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Electronic comments must be in MS Word (.doc), Outlook Message Format (.msg), or RTF (.rtf) format and be sent to: comments-northern-custer-beartooth@fs.fed.us. The subject line must contain "Blitz Ridge Exploration". For electronic comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated receipt, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.