

regarding any prospecting requests. DEQ will send the Forest Service a copy of any reply to the requester. They have a very helpful website: <http://deq.wy.us/landquality>

Before you may commence with any proposed activity, you must receive either a letter from the Forest Service authorizing your proposed activities, OR an approved Plan of Operations. Make sure that you thoroughly describe your proposal, so that an adequate review and response can be made by the Forest Service and DEQ.

Visitor maps are available at Forest Service offices to assist you in identifying available lands. They may also be purchased by logging on to [www.nationalforeststore.com](http://www.nationalforeststore.com), or by calling **406-329-3024**. As of this printing, the cost is \$10.00 per map.

**For Further Information:**

<b>DEQ</b> -Land Quality Div. 1866 S. Sheridan Ave., Sheridan, WY 82801 307-673-9337	<b>BLM</b> – Worland District 101 S. 23 <sup>rd</sup> St. Worland, WY 82401 307-347-5100
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**BLM** – Buffalo District Office  
1425 Fort St., Buffalo, WY 82834  
307-684-1100

**Bighorn National Forest Offices:**

Tongue Ranger District 2013 Eastside 2 <sup>nd</sup> St. Sheridan, WY 82801 307-674-2600	Powder River Ranger District 1415 Fort St. Buffalo, WY 82834 307-684-7806
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Medicine Wheel/Paintrock Ranger District  
604 E. Main St.,  
Lovell, WY 82431  
307-548-6541



## Prospecting on the Bighorn National Forest (36 CFR § 228)

Most of the mineral bearing gravel on the Bighorn has been worked many times over the last century. Still, to many people, searching for that big gold deposit is serious business. For others, it is simply an enjoyable recreational experience during the family vacation. **Please note that you may not drive off of roads or trails for any of the activities described here.**

**Gold Panning** is a common prospecting technique used to find small nuggets and flakes in stream sediments. A large shallow pan with sloped sides and a shovel are the basic tools needed. Stream banks are especially sensitive areas, and are easily susceptible to damage. These riparian areas provide critical water, food, and shelter to wildlife, and help protect the quality of the water. Please remove all litter and refrain from digging above the high water mark. Return any sand and gravel to the hole it was removed from. Simple panning, or the use of a sluice box that does not require mechanical means to operate are acceptable. In order to be acceptable, a dredge or mechanized sluice must be a small, portable unit with a suction hose diameter no larger than 3 inches, and no more than 10 horsepower. Spillage of oil, gas, or grease must be avoided. All fueling & servicing activities, or storage of fuel and equipment should be well away from streams. Prospectors may only use methods & devices that do not cause resource damage, and are for casual collection.

Dredging is restricted to the time period of July 1 to September 1 to minimize disruption of spawning trout (Wyoming DEQ Guideline 19). Dredging of materials such as silt and clay will cause an unacceptable degradation of water quality which can blanket the gravel spawning beds, suffocating eggs & fry. No dredging of beaver ponds is permitted. No mechanized equipment will be used below the high water mark of a stream channel except for the actual dredge itself. Dredging operations should be confined to the channel bottom to avoid undercutting and disturbances to banks and vegetation. If you have something of a larger scale in mind, you will need to work with the local District Office for approval of operations and plans for reclaiming the site.

**Rock Hounding** is the collection of rock or mineral specimens by an amateur for a hobby. Small quantities for personal collections are allowed without a permit as long as no mechanized equipment is used and no significant disturbance of the ground occurs. Please be aware that the collection of any archaeological or historic artifacts or remains from federal lands is prohibited by federal laws and regulations.

**Fossil Collecting** of invertebrate or plant fossils may only be collected in small quantities for personal collections without a permit. Invertebrates include things such as shells and corals. Vertebrate fossils may not be collected or removed from any National Forest Lands.

**Areas to Avoid:** Abandoned Mines are dangerous places that are likely to shelter snakes or other wild animals, have rotted timbers, poisonous gasses, radon buildup, deep shafts, undetonated explosives, and numerous other life-threatening hazards. Do not enter any abandoned mine. There are parcels of private land within the Forest not open to prospecting or mining without the permission of the land owner. Other areas to avoid include active mining claims, recreation residence lots and lodges operated under special use permits, and Forest Service administrative sites. For personal safety be aware of other management activities on the Forest such as timber sales or road construction projects.

#### **Current Claims:**

Information regarding current claims can be obtained at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Office having jurisdiction over the area you are contemplating. Those addresses are included at the end of this brochure. Entering into these claims for the purpose of prospecting or removing any mineral is "claim jumping", or trespassing. Carefully check the area on the ground for any evidence of a claim that may have been staked. If you are in doubt about the area you have chosen to prospect, please check with your local Forest Service Office or the BLM before beginning any activities.

#### **Use of Metal Detectors:**

The use of metal detectors to locate modern coins (less than 50 years old) and small objects of no historical value is a legitimate recreational activity. Metal detectors may be used in developed recreation sites as long as there is not a sign posted that states otherwise. Using a metal detector to locate archaeological or historical material is subject to the Antiquities act of 1906 and Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 as amended. Such use requires a special use permit, which is only granted for scientific research. The use of a metal detector to locate mineral deposits such as gold and silver is considered prospecting, and is subject to the regulations regarding prospecting, as stated above.

#### **Archaeological and Historic Resources:**

Archaeological and historical resources such as artifacts, pottery, structures, and other materials, are the fragile and irreplaceable ties to our past. Please be aware that all archaeological or historical remains located on federal lands are protected under the laws referenced above, and 36 CFR 261.9. It is the responsibility of the user to avoid disturbing, altering, or removing objects protected under these laws and regulations. If you discover such remains, please leave them undisturbed and notify the local Forest Service office. The Forest Service sponsors a public archaeology program called **Passport in Time** through which metal detector enthusiasts and other can help in the investigation and preservation of our past. To become involved, contact your local Forest Service office, or visit [www.passportintime.com](http://www.passportintime.com).

#### **Requirements for Prospecting and Mining on the Bighorn (other than casual collecting):**

Anyone who is proposing to conduct operations which might cause a disturbance of surface resources is required to file a written "Notice of Intent" with the local District Ranger. This should include a thorough description of:

- What is being proposed.
- Location(s), including maps with site specific information such as creek, flood plain, or uplands.
- When you propose to prospect.
- How you propose to prospect (what tools, etc.)
- What is the purpose. (Cannot be for casual collection)
- How you propose to access the site(s).
- Whether you propose to occupy the site(s) while prospecting.

The District Ranger has 15 days to determine whether or not the proposed operations will likely cause a "significant" disturbance of the surface. If a disturbance is likely, the operator will be required to prepare a Plan of Operations, (Form FS-2800-5) which includes provisions for the protection and rehabilitation of the surface resources. The "Notice of Intent" is required for any operations which would involve cutting trees or the use of mechanical earth moving equipment. It is not required for casual prospecting.

If planned mining activities are beyond what the general public is authorized (such as the use of heavy equipment, blasting, camping more than 14 days per site, etc.), you will need to include that information in your "Notice of Intent" and on the Plan of Operations. Contact the local Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Land Division. They will determine if a permit or letter of authorization is necessary from their office. They have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Forest Service, and share information