

Minerals and Geology

Minerals in the Blue Mountains

National forests and grasslands have an essential role in contributing to national policy goals for mineral and energy resources while continuing to sustain the land's productivity for other uses and its capability to support resilient ecosystems. The Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests have a long history of mineral exploration and extraction starting in the mid-1800s when gold and silver were discovered in a variety of locations throughout the Blue Mountains. The three forests recognize minerals and geology resources are an important aspect of social and economic well-being.

Mineral and energy resources are classified into three categories:

- Locatable minerals (such as gold, silver, lead, zinc, and cobalt, and others)
- Leasable minerals (such as oil, natural gas, coal, and others)
- Saleable minerals (common materials such as landscaping rock or sand and gravel)

Geology in the Blue Mountains

Geologic resources include any geologic feature or area that has important scientific value or that is significant to natural resource management or human health and safety concerns. Geologic resources include landforms, bedrock exposures, aquifers and groundwater, caves, geologic and paleontological interpretive sites, and recreational collecting sites for fossils, rocks, and minerals.

Looking Forward

The Blue Mountains National Forests recognize that minerals and geology are an important aspect of life, property livelihoods and services, social and economic well-being, and natural resources.

As commodity prices change and efforts by Congress to domestically source minerals continue, conditions may encourage renewed interest in mining in Eastern Oregon and Washington.

Plan revision efforts do not have an effect on valid, existing rights. If a valid, existing right exists, the Forest Service is obligated to provide reasonable access regardless of management direction in the Forest Plan or National designations.

