To: Diane Wheeler, Project Lead  
From: Rose Lehman, CTNF Climate Change Coordinator  
Date: December 16, 2020

RE: Kilgore Gold Exploration Project, Climate Change Discussion

Summary

The Forest Service and other federal agencies are asked to consider Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) and the effects of climate change on a proposed action and its environmental impacts in National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews (USDA-FS 2009, CEQ 2016) that may be relevant to the decision-making process.

Measurable and meaningful increases in greenhouse gases (GHG) that contribute to global climate change are not expected with the proposed action. The proposed exploration will include drills and other forms of equipment, but the increase would be a small percentage of existing vehicle travel in the area.

The proposed Kilgore Gold Exploration Project is consistent with climate change adaptation strategies recommended for infrastructure and forest vegetation in the Intermountain Region. Concerning infrastructure, such as roads, the Project includes BMPs that reduce the chance of resource degradation that could occur from hydrological events such as extreme rainfall, snowmelt events and flooding. Concerning forest vegetation, the project retains the area as forest and allows for natural recovery of areas disturbed by the creation of temporary roads.

To review this project relative to climate change vulnerability and adaption the primary reference is the Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaption for the Intermountain Region publication completed in 2018 (Halofsky et al 2018a&b).

Context - General Discussion and Forest Service Climate Change Guidance

Climate change science has detected measurable shifts to long-term climatic trends in combination with greater climatic variability, and both are projected to continue in the future. These changes in climate are a consequence of increasing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHG) that have contributed to a global temperature increase (Joyce et al 2013). A warming atmosphere is projected to modify both mean annual precipitation and its variability, and increasing atmospheric energy is anticipated to amplify the frequency and intensity of severe weather events (IPCC 2007a, 2012, NRC 2010 as referenced in Joyce et al 2013).

The Forest Service and other federal agencies are asked to consider Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) and the effects of climate change on a proposed action and its environmental impacts in National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews (USDA-FS 2009) that may be relevant to the decision-making process. It is not a rule, policy or regulation that climate change is considered in NEPA reviews; however
climate change could be a reasonable consideration if there are meaningful measures by alternative on site-specific ecological, recreational and economic trends that relate to the Forest Service overall mission “...to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations” (USDA-FS 2015a)

Given the complex interactions among forest ecosystem processes, disturbance regimes, climate, and nutrients, it is difficult to project how forests and carbon trends will respond under novel future conditions.

The intent of excluding climate change as a topic discussed in detail in this environmental analysis is not to diminish the concern as irrelevant to the Forest Service mission nor proposed projects. For this project, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, carbon cycling and potential effects of climate change on the project are not meaningful measures to compare alternatives and speculations on site-specific ecological, recreational and economic trends are too uncertain for climate change to be a specific resource for analysis.

For actives planned for this project, we are compliant with Forest Plan direction and we are consistent with suggested tactics (project activities) that are climate change adaptive options (strategies) for environmental concerns within the project area.

References


