

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
TUCSON FIELD OFFICE  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NEPA #  
DOI-BLM-AZ-G020-2013-0012-EA

ALTAR RESOURCES - BABO MINING PLAN OF OPERATION

May 15, 2013

## 1. Introduction

- a. **Title:** Altar Resources- Babo (Mildred Peak), Mining Plan of Operation, DOI-BLM-AZ-G020-2013-0012-EA
- b. **Location:** T19S R7E Sec 35 SWSE, three miles south of Baboquivari Peak in Pima County, AZ.
- c. **Originating Office:** Tucson Field Office
- d. **Program:** 3809, Surface Management, AZA-036195
- e. **Applicant:** Altar Resources Partnership
- f. **Background:** Altar Resources Partnership submitted a Mining Notice, AZA-036160, for the proposed action. The Mining Notice was rejected due to the project location being within proposed critical habitat for the jaguar; decision date: January 22, 2013. In its decision the BLM stated that a Mine Plan of Operation (MPO) was required in order to proceed with the proposed activities. On February 20, 2013 Altar Resources Partnership submitted the Mine Plan of Operation evaluated in this environmental assessment.

## 2. Purpose and Need and Decisions to be Made

- a. **Purpose and Need:** The need for this action stems from the requirement that BLM respond to the plan of operation to mine submitted by Altar Resources Partnership under 43 CFR 3809.11 for locatable mineral operations greater than casual use.  
The BLM must determine if the MPO meets the requirements of 43 CFR 3809 and if so, must issue authorization for the implementation of the MPO.
- b. **Decision to be made:** The BLM must determine if the MPO submitted by Altar Resources Partnership, with any mitigation measures required by BLM, meets the requirements of 43 CFR 3809.11. If the MPO meets regulatory requirements including the BLM's no unnecessary or undue degradation standard then the BLM must authorize Altar Resources Partnership to proceed under the MPO (with mitigating measures if warranted).

## 3. Scoping and Issues

- a. Scoping was conducted internally with the Tucson Field Office NEPA Team made up of subject experts in biology, cultural resources, range, recreation, and geology.
- b. The Tucson Field Office NEPA Team identified cultural resources (ground disturbance), threatened or endangered species (jaguar, Kearney's blue star), rangeland health (reclamation), road access (legal access across private land), mineral resources, and vegetation (reclamation and weeds) as issues in need of evaluation with respect to the proposed action.

#### **4. Proposed Action and Alternatives**

- a. No Action: The proposed MPO would not be authorized.
- b. Proposed Action: Altar Resources Partnership proposes to explore for copper and other minerals by drilling up to six 500-foot deep boreholes on mining claims held in the vicinity of Mildred Peak in the Baboquivari Mountains, Pima County, AZ, Maps 1 and 2. Drilling would be completed using a small track mounted drill rig. Access would be via existing roads and via the reopening of a quarter mile of a reclaimed mineral exploration road. Modifications to the access route would include vegetation trimming and hand work (pick and shovel) to allow passage of the tracked drill rig. At each drill site a small mud pit would be dug by hand. No drill pads would be constructed. Reclamation would include refilling of the mud pits, abandonment of the boreholes in compliance with ADWR requirements, and reseeding of the old exploration road.

#### **5. Affected Environment**

The Babo project site is located near Mildred Peak in the Baboquivari Mountains of western Pima County, AZ.

- a. Cultural Resources –The Baboquivari Mountains are rich in pre-historic and historic sites. The access route to the proposed drilling sites consists of existing roads and a reclaimed dozer line. Past disturbances of the proposed project site likely preclude the occurrence of remaining cultural features within the project footprint.
- b. Threatened and Endangered Species – The project area is within proposed critical habitat (Figure 1) for the jaguar, *Panthera onca*, an endangered species, U.S. FWS Docket No. FWS–R2–ES–2012–0042; 4500030114, Federal Register Vol. 77, No. 161, August 20, 2012. A threatened and endangered species list for Pima County was obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Additionally, the project was scoped through the Heritage Data Base Project Evaluation Tool maintained by the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD). Sensitive species that potentially occur in the project area, as revealed through the aforementioned FWS and AGFD data bases, are included in Table 1.
- c. Rangeland Health – The project area is subject to the BLM’s Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Administration, approved April 28, 1997 which includes specific rangeland health metrics.
- d. Road Access – The access route to the proposed drilling sites consists of existing roads and a reclaimed dozer line. The proposed access route crosses private land prior to reaching public lands. The BLM does not have a right of way along this route across this private land.

- e. Mineral Resources – Mining claims on the project area are held by a member of Altar Resources Partnership. Exploration activities have taken place within the project area under previous claimants.
- f. Vegetation – The local plant community is lower Sonoran scrub with palo verde, mesquite, and ocotillo the dominant larger plants. Lehman’s love grass, an invasive species occurs at the project site.

## **6. Environmental Effects**

- a. Cultural Resources
  - i. No Action – Cultural resources will be un-affected under the no action alternative.
  - ii. Proposed Action – The proposed drilling sites and access route have been previously disturbed to the extent that any pre-mining cultural resources within the project footprint are likely to have been obliterated.
  - iii. Mitigation – The decision record will include stipulations to the effect that if the operator uncovers subsurface cultural resources during operations that the operator will halt operations in the vicinity of the discovery and notify the BLM. Operations in the vicinity of the discovery would not resume until the discovery was cleared by a BLM archeologist.
  - iv. Residual impacts – None.
- b. Threatened and Endangered Species
  - i. No Action – The no action alternative will have no impact on the 24 sensitive species listed in Table 1, including jaguar or jaguar habitat.
  - ii. Proposed Action – The proposed action would not impact 21 of the 24 sensitive species that were revealed by searching FWS sensitive species list for Pima County and the Heritage Data Base maintained by AGFD simply because habitat for those species do not occur in the project area. However, the proposed action would occur in proposed critical habitat for jaguar and in habitat suitable for Sonoran desert tortoise. Project impacts to jaguar would include minor habitat fragmentation (removing vegetation from previously disturbed sites that are naturally reclaiming), and operational activity and noise that could disrupt jaguar use of the local area for the duration of the project. These impacts, without mitigation, would result in a may affect not likely to adversely affect for jaguar. Desert tortoise may occur in the operational area and be in danger of crushing due to operational traffic to and from drilling locations.
  - iii. Mitigation –

Mitigating Impacts to Jaguar: Surface disturbance would be limited to an area of less than 5 acres which has been previously disturbed by mining and mineral exploration activities. Drill trails would be reclaimed by seeding with a native grass seed mix. Drill pits would be filled flush to surface. Operations would require 30 days or less to mobilize, drill, reclaim, and de-mobilize. Lighted, night operations are proposed to avoid working in the heat of the day; however, it is recommended that operations be limited to daylight hours, and total operational period be limited to the shortest time frame possible to reduce disturbance to jaguar. With these mitigating measures in place the project will have no effect on the jaguar.

Mitigating Impacts to Desert Tortoise: Employees will be trained in tortoise avoidance and handling procedures, particularly in regard to road use and the potential for tortoise mortality due to operational traffic and other mechanized operations.

- iv. Residual Impacts – None.
- c. Rangeland Health
  - i. No Action – The former dozer line would continue to re-vegetate.
  - ii. Proposed Action – The project area and access road will be temporarily disturbed by mining activities. Reclamation activities would include reseeding of the dozer line.
  - iii. Mitigation – The operator would consult with BLM concerning an appropriate seed mix to use in re-seeding the dozer line.
  - iv. Residual Impacts – None.
- d. Road Access
  - i. No Action – No changes from current conditions.
  - ii. Proposed Action – A dozer line used for previous mineral exploration work would be reopened.  
The proposed route includes the use of a road crossing private land for which BLM has no right of way. The BLM cannot authorize the use of this road as the BLM does not have jurisdiction to do so.
  - iii. Mitigation –Altar Resources Partnership has provided documentation demonstrating that legal access across the private lands along the proposed access route has been obtained including legal access for BLM to administer the proposed MPO and conduct inspection activities related to the proposed MPO.
  - iv. Residual Impacts – None.
- e. Mineral Resources

- i. No Action – Mining would not take place. The area would remain open to future mining activities.
  - ii. Proposed Action – Exploration drilling would occur on the subject mining claims.
  - iii. Mitigation – None.
  - iv. Residual Impacts – None.
- f. Vegetation
  - i. No Action – The reclaimed dozer line would continue to re-vegetate, eventually being colonized by native species from adjacent undisturbed lands.
  - ii. Proposed Action – Vegetation along the access route would be trimmed to allow passage of the tracked drill rig. Any saguaro, barrel and other cacti would be salvaged from the access road and be transplanted to nearby disturbed areas not subject to proposed mining activities. Salvage would only occur if the cacti cannot be avoided during passage of the drill rig. Reclamation will include the reseeding of the project area with an appropriate native seed mix. Drilling and associated activities have the potential to ignite grass fires.
  - iii. Mitigation – The dozer line will be reseeded as part of reclamation. All equipment entering the site will be washed prior to arrival on site to avoid the transmission of invasive or non-native seeds. Operators will observe any fire restrictions that may apply to the involved lands throughout the life of the project. No welding or metal grinding will take place on site without a designated fire watch. Any fires will be reported promptly.
  - iv. Residual Impacts – None.
- g. Cumulative Impacts
  - i. CIAAs (Cumulative Impact Analysis Areas) – The proposed action would occur in a relatively isolated site. For the purposes of this analysis the CIAA is a radius of one mile about the project site for all resources other than road access. The basis for the one mile radius is that noise from drilling operations is unlikely to carry beyond one mile. For road access, the CIAA is the access route from the AZ Hwy 286 to the project site.
  - ii. Cumulative Actions - There are no other foreseen actions occurring within the CIAA for this drilling project. Future mining proposals in the project area could be influenced by the extent that mineral resources are present and discovered through the proposed exploratory drilling.

iii. Impacts of cumulative actions

1. Incremental impact of no action – There are no expected cumulative impacts arising from the no action alternative.
2. Incremental impact of proposed action –
  - a. Noise: The proposed action may incrementally contribute to noise in the immediate vicinity.
  - b. Light: Though not recommended, if lighting during night time operations occurs, lighted operations may temporarily add to light pollution in the Altar Valley and Baboquivari Wilderness. The view from Kitt Peak to the project site is blocked by Baboquivari Peak so no lighting impacts to Kitt Peak observatories are expected.
  - c. Future Mining and Habitat Fragmentation: If extensive mining proposals arise as a result of the proposed exploration, these actions could significantly reduce the potential for jaguar to disperse through the Baboquivari range.

**7. Consultation and Coordination**

- a. Amy Sobiech, Archeologist, BLM – Tucson Field Office
- b. Keith Hughes, Natural Resources Specialist, BLM – Tucson Field Office

**8. List of Preparers** – Daniel Moore, Geologist , BLM – Tucson Field Office

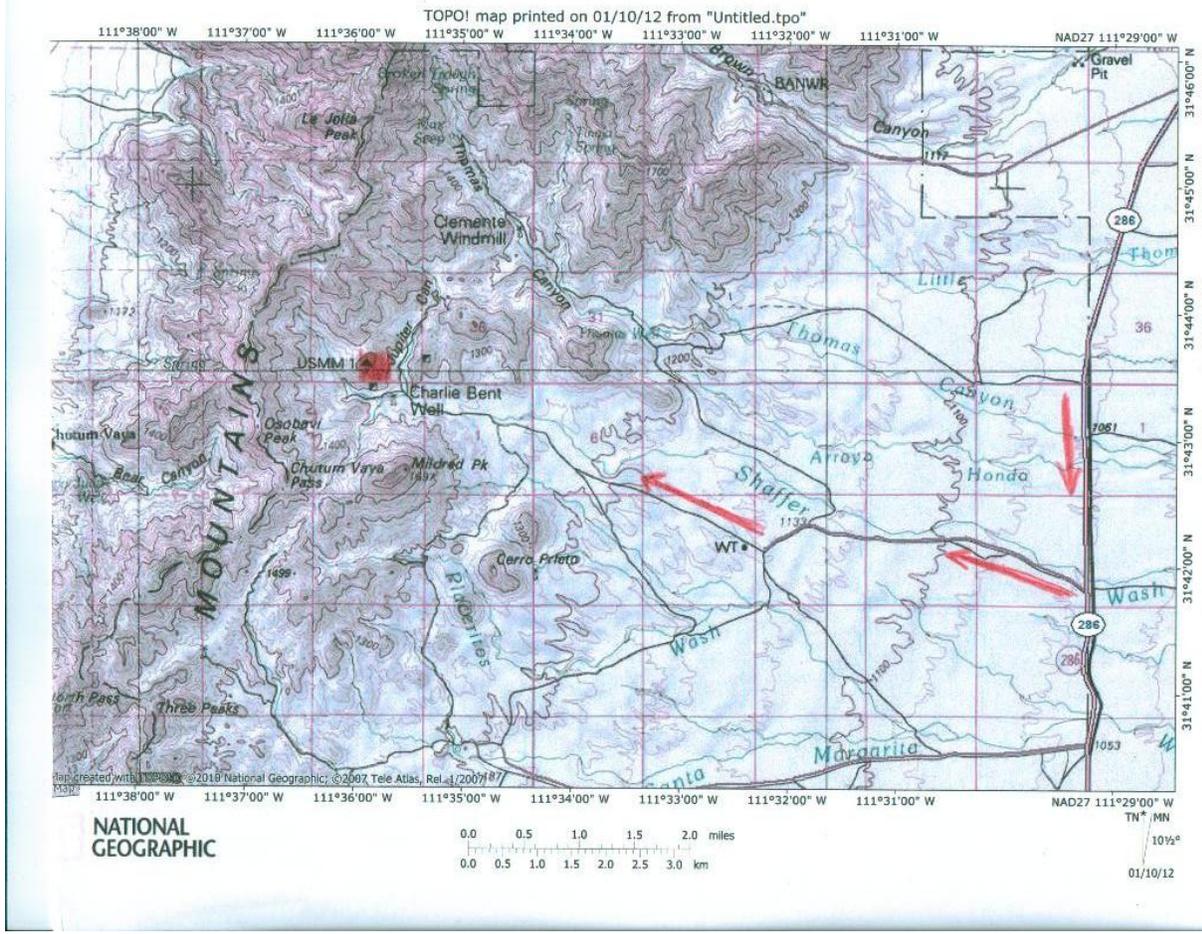
**9. Maps and Figures** – See attached.

**10. Attachments** – Effects Determination for the Jaguar

**Table 1- Special status species\* that may occur on or in the vicinity of the proposed Altar Resources-Babo, Mining Plan of Operation at T19S, R7E, Section 35, SWSE )**

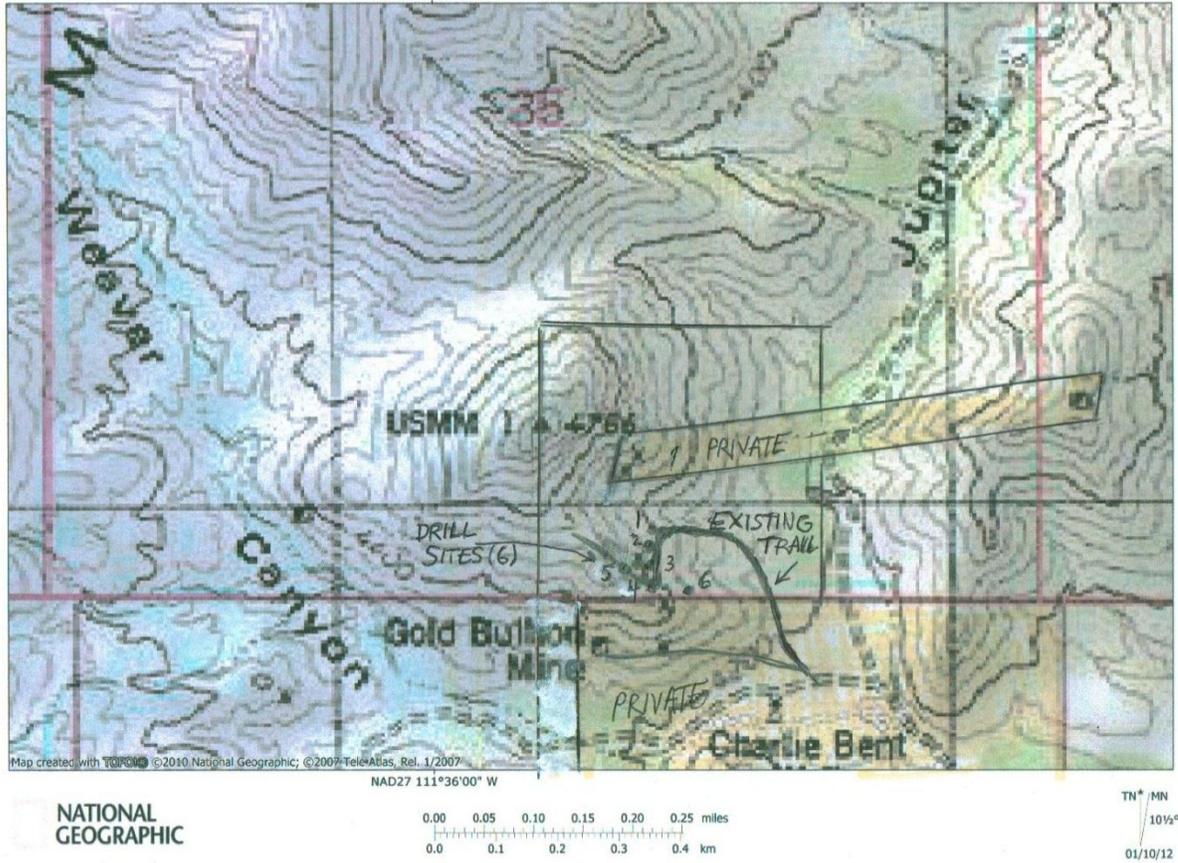
Species	Common Name	Species Status			Anticipated Project Impacts
		FWS	BLM	AZ State	
<i>Echinomastus erectocentrus</i>	Acuna Cactus	PE			No Impact, none located in project area
<i>Sterna antillarum browni</i>	California Least Tern	E			No Impact, no habitat in project area
<i>Cyprinodon macularius</i>	Desert pupfish	E			No Impact, no habitat in project area
<i>Gila intermedia</i>	Gila Chub	E			No Impact, no habitat in project area
<i>Poeciliopsis occidentalis</i>	Gila Topminnow	E			No Impact, no habitat in project area
<i>Leptonycteris curasoae</i>	Lesser long-nosed bat	E			No impact. Forage source in area, but historical surveys do not indicate spp
<i>Lithobates chiricahuensis</i>	Chiricahua Leopard Frog	E			No impact, no habitat in project area
<i>Strix occidentalis</i>	Mexican Spotted Owl	T			No Impact, no habitat in project area
<i>Echinocactus horzonthalonius</i>	Nichol Turk's head Cactus	E			No Impact, none located in project area
<i>Leopardus pardalis</i>	Ocelot	E			No impact. Historic surveys do not indicate species in the area, cover is lacking on site
<i>Lilaeopsis schaffneriana</i>	Hauchuca Water Umbel	E			No Impact, no habitat in project area
<i>Empidonax trailii</i>	SW Willow Flycatcher	E			No Impact, no critical habitat in project area.
<i>Panthera onca</i>	Jaguar	E			Project lies with proposed critical habitat
<i>Coryphantha scheeri</i>	Pima pineapple cactus	E			No Impact, no habitat in project area
<i>Antilocapra Americana sonoriensis</i>	Sonoran Pronghorn	E			No impact, does not occur in project area
<i>Amsonia kearneyana</i>	Kearney's blue star	E			No impact, no habitat in project area
<i>Graptopetalum bartramii</i>	Bartram Stonecrop	SC	S	SR	No impact, no habitat in project area
<i>Gopherus morafkai</i>	Sonoran Desert Tortoise	C			No impact if operators comply with species avoidance protocol. Project area is suitable, but uncategorized habitat.
<i>Chionactis occipitalis</i>	Tucson shovel-nosed snake	C			No Impact, no habitat in project area

Coccyzus americanus	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	C			No Impact, no habitat in project area
Allium gooddingii	Gooddings onion	CA			No impact, no habitat in project area
Sonorelia eremita	San Xavier talussnail	CA			No impact, no habitat in project area
Amoreuxia gonzalezii	Saiya	SC		HS	No impact, no limestone habitat in project area
Choeronycteris mexicana	Mexican long-tounged bat		S	WSC	No impact, forage/roost resources will not be impacted,
PE-proposed endangered, E-Endangered, T-Threatened, C-Candidate, SC-Species of Concern, WSC-Wildlife Species of Concern, SR- Salvage Restricted, CA-Conservation Agreement,. * species list obtained from AGFD Heritage Data Base and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service					



Map 1. Project Location Map showing proposed access route.

TOPO! map printed on 01/10/12 from "Untitled.tpo"  
NAD27 111°36'00" W



Map 2. Project Area Map

BLM Env. Assessment # DOI-BLM-AZ-G020-2013-0012-EA  
 ALTAR RESOURCES - BABO MINING PLAN OF OPERATION

United States Department of the Interior  
 Bureau of Land Management  
 Tucson Field Office  
 Land Status updated as of August, 2010

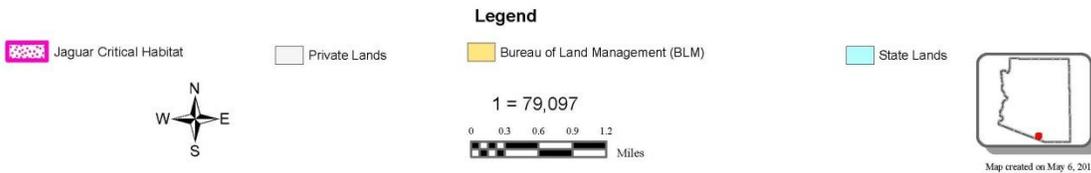
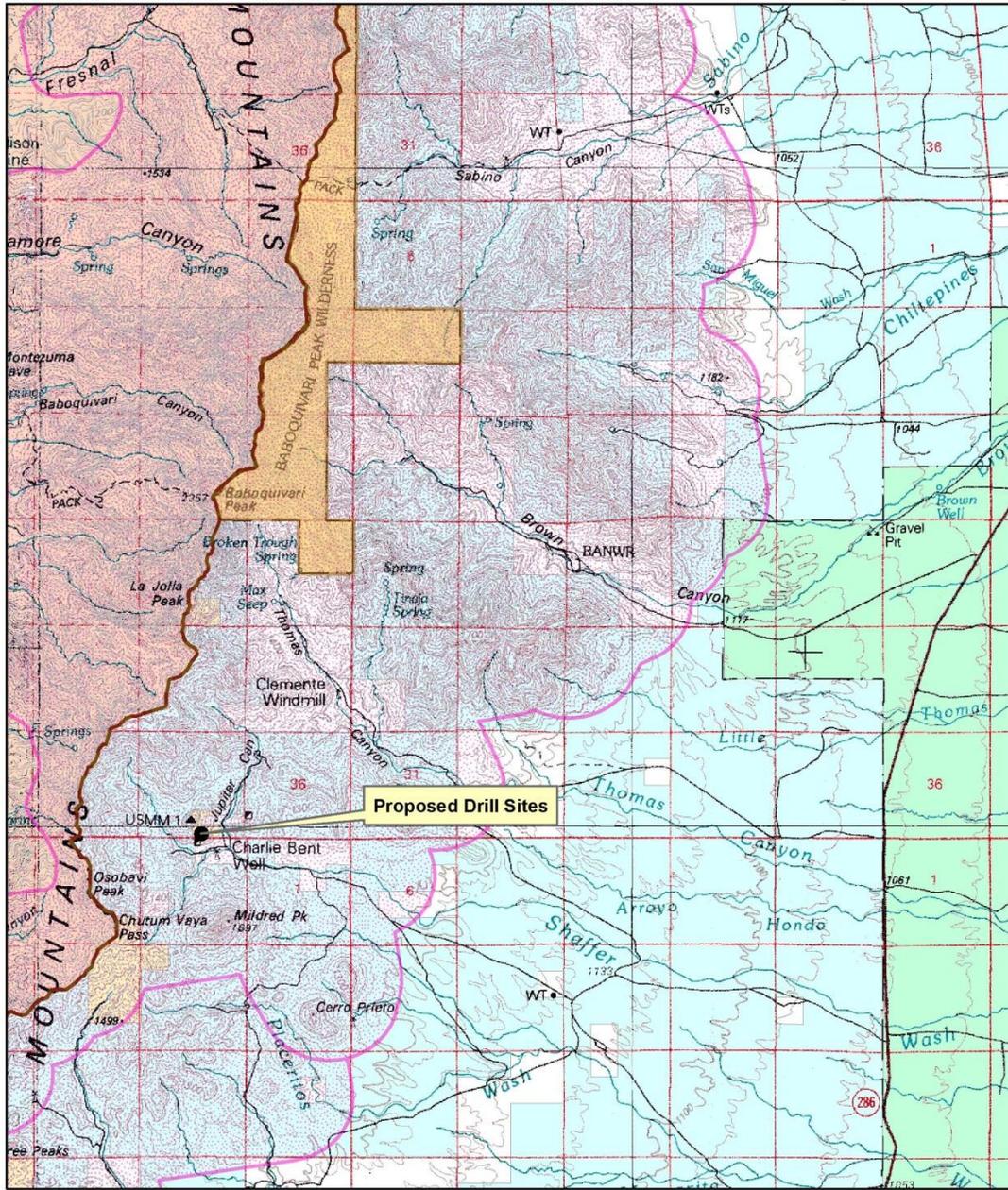


Figure 1. Proposed exploratory drill site at T19S, R7E, Section 35, SWSE. Bureau of Land Management, Tucson Field Office.



Figure 2. Tracked drill rig to be used on project