

SCOPING/INFORMATION PACKAGE

Panels F and G Lease and Mine Modification Project at the Smoky Canyon Mine Pocatello Field Office

This information package summarizes a proposal received by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for lease and mine plan modifications to Panels F and G at the Smoky Canyon Phosphate Mine in Caribou County, Idaho. Smoky Canyon Mine is approximately 10 air miles west of Afton, Wyoming, and 8 miles west of the Idaho/Wyoming border (**Figure 1**). Panels F and G are within Federal phosphate leases IDI-27512 and IDI-01441 on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest (CTNF). Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this scoping package is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA review of the proposal. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing, and will be documented in an environmental impact statement (EIS) with an estimated completion date of November 2014. The EIS will tier to the 2007 *Smoky Canyon Mine, Panels F and G—Final Environmental Impact Statement* (FEIS), which is available at <http://www.fs.fed.us/outernet/r4/caribou-targhee/phosphate/>. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the Proposed Action and to identify alternatives to the Proposed Action that meet the purpose of and need for the project.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the proposed project is to modify existing Panel G lease IDI-01441 and the approved mine and reclamation plan (MRP) for Panels F and G. The MRP originally proposed by the J.R. Simplot Company (Simplot) in 2003 was subsequently analyzed in the 2007 FEIS and authorized by BLM and U.S Forest Service (FS) records of decision (RODs) in 2008. The proposed lease and mine modifications are needed to safely accommodate overburden generated from mining Panel G and to realize opportunities for greater efficiencies in ore transportation.

The BLM is the delegated authority to issue and administer Federal phosphate leases, including approval of MRPs proposed on lease. As such, the BLM is the lead Federal agency for the EIS. The BLM intends to utilize an interdisciplinary team of FS staff for the EIS, and the FS will be a co-lead for the EIS. The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality is a cooperating agency.

Existing Condition

The 2007 FEIS for the original MRP for Panels F and G provides a detailed description of the existing conditions. Smoky Canyon mining and milling operations were authorized in 1982 by mine plan approval issued by the BLM and special use authorizations issued by the FS for off-lease activities. Mining operations began in Panel A in 1984 and have been continuing ever since with the mining of Panels A-E. Panel F is contiguous with the south end of the existing mine and Panel G is located approximately one mile southwest of Panel F. Mining activities

associated with Panel F were initiated in 2008 and are ongoing. The only mining activities associated with Panel G to date have been the early stages of haul road construction.

Activities at the mine must comply with the 2012 *Pocatello Resource Management Plan* and the 2003 *Revised Forest Plan for the Caribou National Forest*.

Proposed Action

Simplot submitted a lease and mine plan modification proposal for Panels F and G at the Smoky Canyon Mine in February 2013. The proposed mine plan modification to Panel F is related to the construction and use of an ore conveyance system between Panel F and the existing mill (**Figure 2**). The proposed conveyance system would generally follow an existing road and would deviate only where constraints dictate (i.e., too tight a corner on the road to construct the conveyor). Construction of the conveyor would eliminate the need to haul ore to the mill via haul trucks, although the access road would remain open to other vehicles. The proposed 4.5-mile conveyor system would include a crusher and stockpile location on lease in Panel F and a 25 kV power line secured to the conveyor structures. A portion of the conveyor system would be located off- lease and require a FS special use authorization.

There are three components to the proposed modification of Panel G (**Figure 3**): 1) modification of lease IDI-01441 by 280 acres to accommodate the expansion of the previously approved run-of mine east overburden disposal area (ODA); 2) increase in the on-lease disturbance area of the previously approved south ODA by 20 acres for the temporary storage of chert to be used for reclamation; and 3) utilization of a geo-synthetic clay laminate liner (GCLL), instead of the previously approved geologic cover design, over the in-pit backfill and the east external ODA. The current lease area for Panel G is not large enough to allow for maximum ore recovery and the necessary overburden disposal. The lease modification is necessary to accommodate all of the overburden generated from mining Panel G as analyzed in the FEIS¹. The proposed expansion of the external east ODA would require Simplot to mine Panel G in a south to north sequence, necessitating the temporary storage of an additional 20 acres of chert to be used for reclaiming the final highwall. The purpose of covering the entirety of seleniferous waste in Panel G with a GCLL is to limit or prevent the potential release of contaminants to the environment.

In addition, Simplot is proposing to construct stormwater control features to address run-off from the proposed GCLL. It is estimated that up to 17 acres of new disturbance may be necessary for these stormwater features. Portions of these features could be situated on-lease, within the proposed lease modification area, or off- lease. Off-lease disturbance would require FS special use authorization.

In total, approximately 160 acres are proposed for new disturbance. Compared to what was analyzed in the 2007 FEIS, there would be an additional 10 acres disturbed in Panel F for the ore conveyor system (mostly at the north end of Panel F); 20 acres for the Panel G south ODA

¹ At the time the RODs for the 2007 FEIS were issued, neither BLM nor FS could approve Simplot's original plan for overburden storage. This is detailed in the RODs, which are available at <http://www.fs.fed.us/outernet/r4/caribou-targhee/phosphate/>.

expansion for temporary chert storage; up to 17 acres for stormwater control features to address run-off from the GCLL at Panel G; and 113 acres for the Panel G east seleniferous ODA expansion.

Preliminary Issues

The majority of preliminary issues related to the Proposed Action occur from the proposed new surface disturbance and associated proposed lease modification. Issues include:

1. There would be an increase in the amount of disturbance by approximately 160 acres, or approximately 12 percent, over what was analyzed in the 2007 FEIS.
2. Potential impacts to groundwater quantity could be greater than those disclosed in the 2007 FEIS because of a decrease in recharge area to the Wells Formation from surface infiltration due to the GCLL.
3. Potential impacts to surface water quality after reclamation could increase due to the reduced infiltration of the GCLL which could increase peak stream flows. Increased peak stream flows have the potential to increase channel instability and cause stream bank and stream bed erosion.
4. The same types of potential impacts as those described by the 2007 FEIS but over an additional 160 acres for topography, soils, vegetation, wildlife, fisheries, threatened and endangered species, livestock management, recreation, visual and aesthetic resources, and cultural resources.
5. There would be an impact to approximately 70 acres of the Sage Creek Inventoried Roadless Area. This is 6 percent greater than was analyzed in the 2007 FEIS.

Preliminary Alternatives Development

No action alternative(s) to the Proposed Action have been developed to date.

Under the No Action Alternative, Simplot would implement the currently approved MRP as documented in the RODs. However, Simplot estimates that approximately 50 percent of the phosphate ore in Panel G, previously considered economically recoverable, would not be mined. The overall disturbance would remain essentially the same as what was approved in the 2007 FEIS. There would be no reduction in the duration of mining Panel G, as it is likely the Panel G pit would be blended with ore mined from other locations. In addition, the proposed conveyor system would not be approved, thus no new disturbance associated with the conveyor would occur. No lease modification to Panel G would be necessary under the No Action Alternative. The previously approved geologic cover would be used to limit or prevent the potential release of contaminants to the environment.

Decision to be Made

The BLM will make a decision regarding this proposal while considering: scoping comments and responses, anticipated environmental consequences discussed in the EIS; and applicable laws, regulations, and policies.

The BLM will use the EIS to:

1. Determine whether the proposed mine modifications to the existing Panels F and G MRP should be approved. If the proposed modifications are approved, the approval will include specific conditions and mitigations that Simplot would be required to implement.
2. Determine whether existing lease IDI-01441 should be enlarged to include the proposed areas and approve a lease modification.

The FS will use the EIS to:

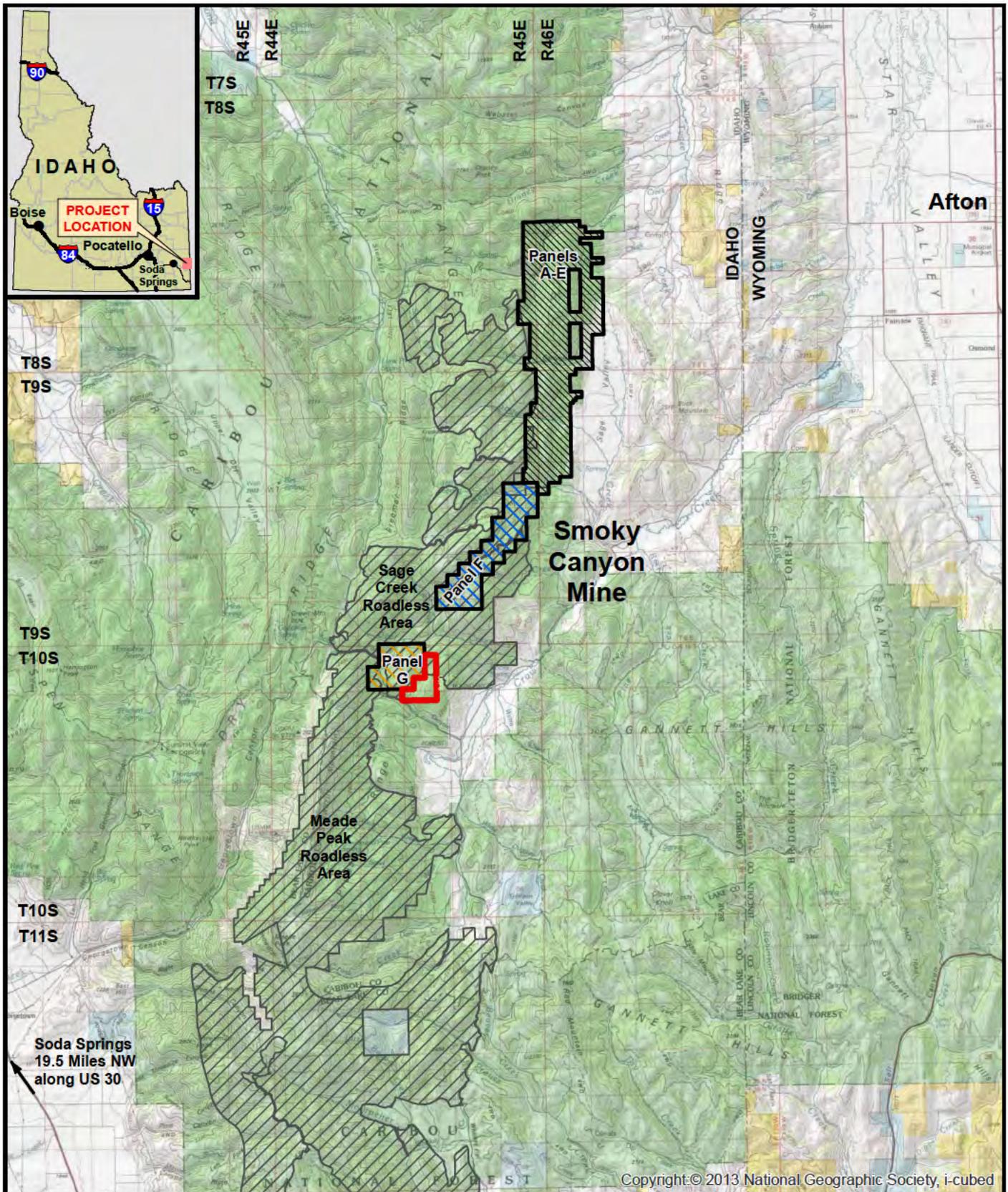
1. Determine whether special use authorizations should be approved for construction of off-lease conveyor system structures and off-lease stormwater control features.

The BLM will decide whether to implement the Proposed Action, any feasible and potentially developed action alternative(s), or the No Action Alternative which is the currently approved MRP for Panels F and G.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the Proposed Action and preliminary issues. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by July 26, 2013 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EIS. Written comments may be submitted to: Panels F and G Lease and Mine Plan Modification Project EIS, C/O JBR Environmental, 8160 South Highland Drive, Sandy, UT 84093; or via email at: BLM_ID_scm_panelsfg@blm.gov. Please reference "Panels F and G Lease and Mine Plan Modification Project EIS" on all correspondence. Identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are determined to be outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed in the EIS.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Diane Wheeler, Project Lead, (208) 557-5839 or email: dkwheeler@fs.fed.us. Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 to contact the above individual during normal business hours. The FIRS is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to leave a message or question with the above individual. You will receive a reply during normal business hours.



Explanation

- Smoky Canyon Mine Leases
- Panels A-E
- Panel F (Lease I-27512)
- Panel G (Lease I-01441)
- Proposed Lease Modification Area

- Roadless Area
- Land Ownership**
- BLM
- Private
- State
- USFS

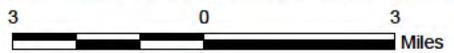
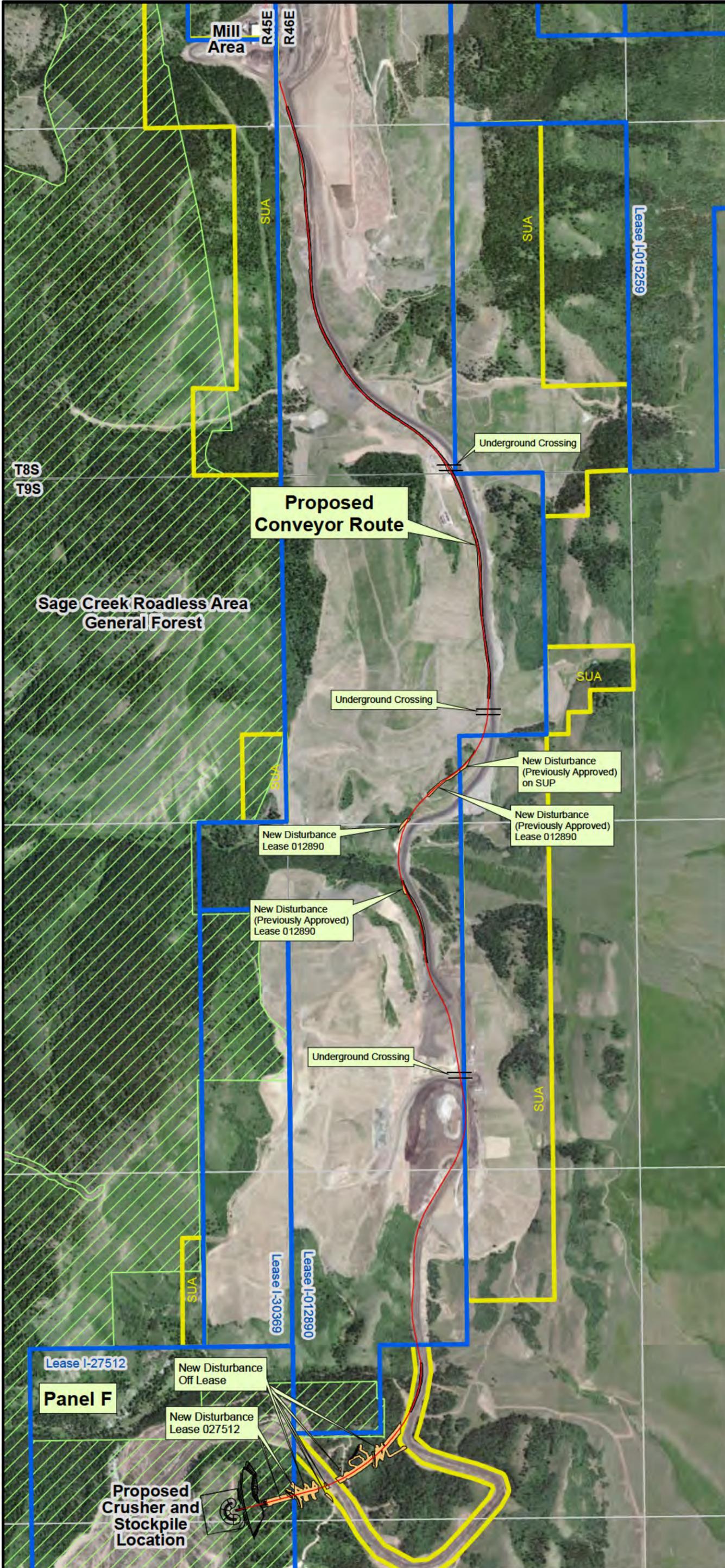


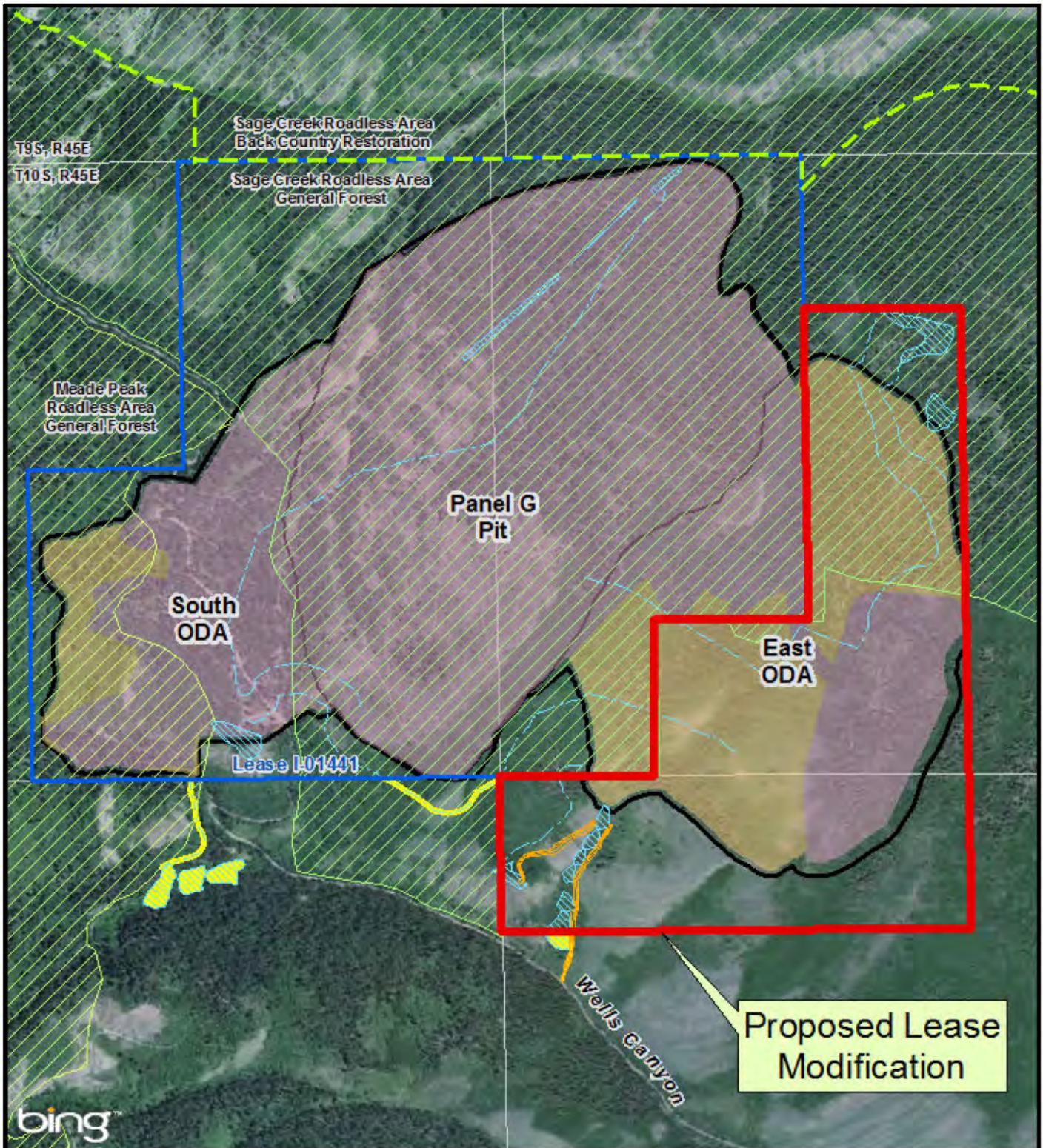
Figure 1
General Project Area
Panel F & G Lease/Mine Plan Modifications EIS



Explanation

-  Proposed Conveyor Route
-  New Disturbance
-  JR Simplot Lease
-  Special Use Authorization (SUA)
-  Roadless Area

Figure 2
Panel F Mine Plan
Modification Areas
Panel F & G Lease/Mine Plan
Modifications EIS



Service Layer Credits: Image courtesy of USGS © 2013 Microsoft Corporation

Explanation

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|----------------------------------|--|
| Panel G Disturbance Boundary | Proposed Stormwater Control Ditch (On Lease) |
| Panel G Pit Boundary | Proposed Stormwater Control Pond (On Lease) |
| Proposed ODA Expansions | Proposed Stormwater Control Road Disturbance (On Lease) |
| Approved Panel G Disturbance | Proposed Stormwater Control Ditch (Off Lease) |
| Proposed Lease Modification Area | Proposed Stormwater Control Pond (Off Lease) |
| JR Simplot Lease | Proposed Stormwater Control Road Disturbance (Off Lease) |
| Sage Creek | |
| Meade Peak | |

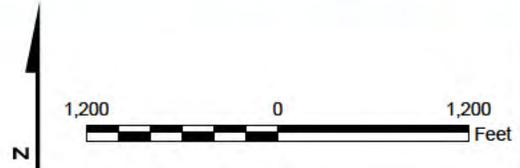


Figure 3
Panel G Lease/Mine Plan Modification Areas
Panel F & G Lease/Mine Plan Modifications EIS