

Finding of No Significant Impact

**United States
Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Battle Mountain District/Tonopah Field Office**

An Environmental Assessment of Mineral Ridge Gold's Proposed Plan of Operations Amendment

DOI-BLM-NV-B020-2014-0002-EA

Introduction

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment (EA) of the Mineral Ridge Gold's Plan of Operations Amendment (DOI-BLM-NV-B020-2014-0002-EA), dated February 2014. After consideration of the environmental effects as described in the EA, and incorporated herein, I have determined that the proposed action with the project design specifications, including the environmental protection measures identified in the EA would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required to be prepared.

This finding and conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context

The project is a site-specific action directly or indirectly involving 452 acres of BLM-administered public land and 56 acres of private land that does not in and of itself have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance.

Mineral Ridge Gold LLC. (MRG) has submitted a Plan of Operations Amendment under the General Mining Law of 1872 and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). MRG proposes to further develop their existing mine and conduct additional exploration operations.

The Project is located approximately 30 miles southwest of Tonopah, Nevada. MRG proposes to expand the Plan Boundary by 508 acres; include the Missouri Claim as a patented claim within the Plan Boundary; expand both the Drinkwater Pit and the Mary Pit; change the project

schedule; increase the tons of ore and waste produced per year; add waste rock disposal areas WD-10 and WD-11; change the footprints and disturbance areas of waste rock disposal areas WD-1, WD-2, WD-5, WD-6, WD-7, and WD-9; increase the ore stacking height on the leach pad; conduct exploration activities within the expanded area of the Plan Boundary; add communication equipment; reroute the power line; add general disturbance acreage; and decrease road disturbance.

The actions proposed in the Plan Amendment would result in approximately 72 acres of additional ground disturbance, 36 acres of which is located on public lands administered by the BLM, Battle Mountain District, Tonopah Field Office.

Intensity

I have considered the potential intensity and severity of the impacts likely to be associated with the implementation of the project relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

1. Would the proposed action have significant beneficial or adverse impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b) (1)? No.

Rationale: The Proposed Action would have adverse impacts on resources which are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 of the EA. However, these impacts would be minor due to the implementation of the environmental protection measures outlined in section 2.2.5 of the EA.

The Proposed Action would have beneficial impacts on socioeconomic values because the approval of the Plan Amendment would enable 110 people to be employed for an additional year.

2. Would the proposed action have significant adverse impacts on public health and safety (40 CFR 1508.27(b) (2)? No.

Rationale: The proposed action would not have significant adverse impacts on public health and safety because MRG would be required to follow all Mine, Health and Safety Administration regulations along with maintaining all equipment and facilities in a safe and orderly manner.

3. Would the proposed action have significant adverse impacts on unique geographic characteristics (cultural or historic resources, park lands, prime and unique farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, designated wilderness or wilderness study areas, or ecologically critical areas (ACECs, RNAs, significant caves) (40 CFR 1508.27(b) (3)? No.

Rationale: There are no park lands, prime and unique farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, designated wilderness or wilderness study areas, or ecologically critical areas present within or in the vicinity of the Project Area. There are unique cultural or historic resources in the area of the Proposed Action, however; there will not be any significant adverse impacts as MRG, in conjunction with a BLM archaeologist and the Nevada SHPO, has developed a

Programmatic Agreement on how historic properties are to be treated in the Project Area. (see section 2.2.5 of the EA).

4. Would the proposed action have highly controversial effects (40 CFR 1508.27(b) (4)? No.

Rationale: The actions proposed (e.g. pit expansions, additional waste rock dumps, exploration and increase in ore stacking height) are common mining activities accomplished using common pieces of equipment which would result in effects that are well understood. Additionally, the effects in sections 3 and 4 of the EA were assessed using common practices (i.e. best available science and specialist's expertise).

Due to the common nature of the actions proposed and the use of best available science to assess effects, the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects outlined in sections 3 and 4 of the EA would not be expected to be highly controversial to the general population of the region.

However, one interest group, the American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign, are very concerned about the welfare of wild horse and burros in the region and are not likely to agree with the approval of the Plan Amendment.

5. Would the proposed action have highly uncertain effects or involve unique or unknown risks (40 CFR 1508.27(b) (5)? No.

Rationale: The Proposed Action would not have highly uncertain effects or involve unique or unknown risks. Resources effects are outlined in Chapters 3 and 4 of the EA. The Proposed Action does not involve anything unique or uncommon for a mining project of this type.

6. Would the proposed action establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b) (6)? No.

Rationale: The actions proposed are common activities associated with a mining proposal and would not set a precedent for future actions.

7. Is the proposed action related to other actions with potentially significant cumulative impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b) (7)? No.

Rationale: Chapter 4 of the EA outlines cumulative impacts that the proposed action would have when considered in light of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. These cumulative impacts are not predicted to be significant.

8. Would the proposed action have significant adverse impacts on scientific, cultural, or historic resources, including those listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Resources (40 CFR 1508.27(b) (8)? No.

Rationale: There are scientific, cultural, or historic resources that are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Resources within the proposed Project Area. However, there will not be any significant adverse impacts as MRG, in conjunction with a BLM

archaeologist and the Nevada SHPO, has developed a Programmatic Agreement on how historic properties are to be treated in the Project Area (see section 2.2.5 of the EA).

9. Would the proposed action have significant adverse impacts on threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat (40 CFR 1508.27 (b) (9)? No.

Rationale: No Federally Threatened or Endangered species or signs of were observed during biological surveys of the Project Area.

10. Would the proposed action have effects that threaten to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR 1508.27 (b) (10)? No.

Rationale: Due to the implementation of environmental protection measures and the requirement to obtain permits from the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection, no Federal, State or local laws would be violated.

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Date