

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**Montezuma Mining Incorporated
South Sleeper Exploration Project
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-NV-W010-2014-0029-EA**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on the interdisciplinary analysis conducted in South Sleeper Exploration Project Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-W010-2014-0029-EA dated February 2016, a review of the plan of operations, and my consideration of the Council of Environmental Quality's criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts, I have determined that the impacts associated with the Proposed Action, are not significant. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement pursuant to Section 102(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for the South Sleeper Exploration Project is not required.

I have determined that the Proposed Action is in conformance with the Winnemucca District Planning Area Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Record of Decision, May 21, 2015, as amended by the Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan Amendments for the Great Basin Region Including the Greater-Sage Grouse Sub-Regions of Idaho and Southwestern Montana, Nevada and Northeastern California, Oregon, and Utah, September 21, 2015. There is no Greater Sage-grouse habitat within the Plan of Operations Boundary as delineated in the amended Winnemucca District RMP. The Proposed Action is consistent with other Federal agency, state, and local plans to the maximum extent consistent with Federal law and Federal Land Policy Management Act provisions.

Context

In May 2014, the BLM acknowledged receipt of a complete Plan of Operations (Plan) (NVN-092492) from Montezuma Mining Incorporated (MMI). MMI's Plan proposed to expand their Notice-level (NVN-092758) exploration to a total of 100 acres of exploration related disturbance within the 3,459-acre Project Area boundary. They proposed to conduct 44.94 acres of disturbance under phase I, and up to 50.81 acres under subsequent phases.

The Proposed Action consists of the following exploration related activities:

- Construction of drill sites;
- Construction of roads;
- Installation of geotechnical auger holes;
- Installation of geologic test pits/trenching;
- Installation of water extraction/monitoring wells; and
- Installation of a meteorological station.

The proposed South Sleeper Project Area is approximately 30 miles north-northwest of Winnemucca in Humboldt County, Nevada and immediately south of the existing Sleeper Mine. The Project Area for the proposed Plan includes all or parts of Township 39 North, Range 34

East, sections 1 and 12; Township 40 North, Range 35 East, sections 31 through 35; and Township 39 North, Range 35 East, sections 4 through 9. The approximately 3,459 acre Plan boundary is located on public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management Winnemucca District, Humboldt River Field Office (BLM). The Project Area is currently accessed via Sod House Road from SR 140

Following BLM and NDEP approval, operations would likely begin in 2016 and life of the project is anticipated to be a total of 20 years. This includes approximately 10 years of exploration, with up to 10 years of reclamation and monitoring periods.

Intensity

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The EA analysis considered possible beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed project. The South Sleeper EA incorporates applicable environmental protection measures that would help to reduce impacts. The remainder of the environmental impacts that were studied in the EA resulted in very low intensity impacts. This was primarily due to the location and nature of the project.

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

Exploration activities are not expected to cause adverse public health effects. The Plan of Operations includes environmental protection measures and a Spill Contingency Plan. Operational safety measures would be required by the Mine Safety and Health Administration and the Nevada Industrial Relations Division of Mine Safety. No long-term adverse public health or safety effects are expected from use of the reclaimed area.

3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The project would not affect park lands, prime farmland, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas. All areas to be disturbed by exploration activity have been surveyed and evaluated for historic and/or cultural resources. No National Register eligible properties would be impacted by the proposed action.

4) The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Mining and exploration activities are not new to Nevada or Humboldt County. Issues and concerns brought forward through the NEPA process were taken into consideration for analysis in preparing the Preliminary EA. There were no concerns raised on the Preliminary EA. No controversial issues are anticipated to arise from the Project.

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the environment are likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

The exploration activities and techniques involved are all common methods employed in the mining industry and are not expected to produce uncertain or unique risks.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

Approval of the proposed action would not set any known precedents or establish any principles for future decisions. The proposed exploration activities have been commonly applied for several decades and present no new actions or activities.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

Cumulative impacts to the area were assessed in the EA. Detailed analysis of the Cumulative Effects Study Area was conducted to assess the potential cumulative impacts. No cumulative impacts of any consequence were found through the analysis.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.*

The proposed action would have no adverse effects to cultural or historic resources. No National Register eligible properties are present within the Project Area. No issues or concerns were raised during Native American consultation. Through the environmental protection measures, any unanticipated discoveries would be avoided and not impacted by the proposed action.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under ESA of 1973.*

No threatened or endangered species or their habitat would be affected by the proposed action and therefore, no adverse impacts are anticipated.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

No threats of violation were identified in the preparation of the EA.



Steve Sappington
Field Manager Humboldt River Field Office

3-11-2016

Date