

# Hercules Exploration Project

Finding of No Significant Impact

DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2014-0033-EA

December 2014



## **Background**

Bonaventure Nevada Inc. (BVT) has submitted to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Sierra Front Field Office a draft Plan of Operations (Plan) for exploration activities. The Hercules Exploration Project (Project) would consist of exploration drilling from 167 constructed drill sites and trenching at 25 sites, to be accessed by existing and proposed constructed roads. These exploration activities would be a continuation of Notice-level (N-89713) exploration that BVT has been conducting in the Project area of the past three years. BVT has completed approximately 4.6 acres of Notice-level exploration, and once the Plan is approved an additional 18.02 acres of disturbance would occur over a two-year period. Upon the completion of exploration activities, reclamation would be completed.

## **Determination**

On the basis of the information contained in the *Hercules Exploration Project Final Environmental Assessment* (EA) (DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2014-0033-EA), I have determined that the Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore an environmental impact statement (EIS) will not be required.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the *context* and *intensity* of the impacts described in the final EA, which is hereby incorporated by reference.

## **Context**

The Project area is located at the north end of the Pine Nut Mountains. The elevation ranges from approximately 5,600 feet to 6,600 feet above mean sea level. Precipitation varies between eight and twelve inches per year. The soils in the Project area are typically very rocky and shallow to bedrock. Major vegetation communities include sagebrush and pinyon-juniper woodlands. The Project area is in the vicinity of the Hercules Mine which opened in 1858; during the past three decades approximately 236 exploration drill holed have been completed.

## **Intensity**

*1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*

During exploration activities there would be adverse effects to vegetation and wildlife. Vegetation would be removed from approximately 17 acres of constructed drill sites and proposed roads. Exploration equipment and personal would cause noise that would result in displacement of wildlife into surrounding areas. The vegetation community is common regionally. Upon the conclusion of exploration activities, disturbed areas would be reclaimed. In the long-term, with successful reclamation, vegetation and wildlife habitat characteristics would be anticipated to return to post-exploration conditions.

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

Exploration activities would result in an increase in equipment and motorized vehicles in the Project area. Public use of the area is generally low and dispersed. Exploration activities would not result in increased concerns about public safety. There are no public health concerns from the exploration activities.

*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 Proposed Action would have no effect to prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas (such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern) because these resources are not present in the Project area.

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

The effects from exploration activities and road construction described in the Proposed Action are well understood and are not highly controversial.

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

There are no known effects of the Proposed Action which are considered uncertain or involve unique or unknown 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.*

The Proposed Action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Any future actions within the Project area, if they were to occur, would be subject to separate environmental review and decision-making.

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

The Project is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

*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 of destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

The BLM has determined that the Project would have no effect to sites eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (CRR 3-2674).

*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 the ESA or 1973.*

No federally listed species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), or its critical habitat for such species occurs within the Project area.

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

The Proposed Action is in conformance with the Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan (2001). Implementation of the Proposed Action would not violate or threaten to violate any federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

ACTING  
FOR



Leon Thomas  
Field Manager  
Sierra Front Field Office

12-10-2014

Date