

**UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
BATTLE MOUNTAIN DISTRICT/MOUNT LEWIS FIELD OFFICE**

**DOI-BLM-B010-2015-0055-EA**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**SEP 11 2015**

I have reviewed Environmental Assessment (EA) **DOI-BLM-NV-B020-2015-0055-EA** dated July 2015. 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 features identified in the EA will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as described in 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1508.27. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required per section 102(2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

DOI-BLM-NV-B010-2015-0055-EA has been reviewed through the interdisciplinary team process, as well as being sent to the Nevada State Clearinghouse and the public for a 30-day comment period.

After consideration of the environmental effects of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) preferred alternative (the Proposed Action) described in the EA and the supporting baseline documentation, it has been determined that the Proposed Action identified in the EA is not a major Federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment.

It has been determined that the Proposed Action is in conformance with the approved Shoshone-Eureka Resource Management Plan and its amendments, and is consistent with the plans and policies of neighboring local, county, state, tribal, and federal agencies and governments.

**Context**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has evaluated the Amendment to the Plan of Operations (APO) titled, *Barrick Cortez Inc. (NVN-067575 [14-1A]) Amendment 3 to Plan of Operations and Reclamation Permit Application* and has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA), DOI-BLM-NV-B010-2015-0055-EA that analyzes the affected environment, environmental impacts, and identifies environmental protection measures associated with Barrick Cortez Inc. (BCI) Cortez Gold Mine Project Operation Area (Project). The final APO was submitted in August 20, 2015, in accordance with the BLM Surface Management Regulations 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 3809, as amended. It has been assigned BLM case file number NVN-067575 (14-1A). The proposed modifications will result in a total of 581 acres of new surface disturbance and the reallocation of use of currently authorized disturbance at the Pipeline and Cortez Hills complexes. The total surface disturbance within the Plan of Operations Area will increase from 16,119 acres to 16,700 acres. The proposed modifications will be located

on BLM-administered land within all or parts of Township 28 North (T28N), Range 47 East (R47E), Sections 28, 29, 30, 31, and 33; T27N, R46E, Sections 1, 12, and 13; T27N, R47E, Sections 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 16, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26, 35, and 36; T27N, R48E, Sections 30 and 31; and T26N, R47E, Sections 1 and 2, Mount Diablo Base and Meridian (MDB&M), Eureka and Lander Counties, Nevada (Project Area). APO proposes modifications to facilities in two of the mining complexes in the Cortez Gold Mines Operations Area and modifications to overall operations as summarized below (the Proposed Action):

#### Pipeline Complex:

- Deepen the existing Gap Pit (west portion of the existing Pipeline Pit complex)
- Expand the existing Area 30 (Pipeline South Area) Heap Leach Facility and Gap Waste Rock Facility and construct associated storm water diversions
- Reconfigure and increase the height of the existing Pipeline/South Pipeline Waste Rock Facility
- Construct a new water treatment plant and associated facilities
- Construct additional mine infrastructure (e.g., administration building, maintenance shop, etc.) and reconfigure the life-of-mine power line
- Expand the capacity of the refractory ore stockpile on top of the Pipeline/South Pipeline Waste Rock Facility

#### Cortez Hills Complex:

- Reconfigure and increase the height of the existing Canyon Waste Rock Facility
- Construct new Range Front Declines (RFDs) and associated surface facilities
- Construct additional surface facilities to support currently authorized underground operations
- Relocate and expand the capacity of the refractory ore stockpiles, and develop an oxide ore stockpile, on top of the Canyon Waste Rock Facility

#### Overall Operations:

- Modify the mining rate between the Pipeline and Cortez Hills complexes to provide operational flexibility
- Retain currently authorized off site refractory ore shipping rate of 1.2 million tons per year (tpy) to the existing Goldstrike Mill for processing, but eliminate the on site location restrictions to provide for operational flexibility
- Backhaul up to 600,000 tpy of oxide (mill- and heap leach-grade) ore from the Arturo Mine through the Goldstrike Mine to the Pipeline Complex for processing

In addition to the proposed activities and modifications listed above, BCI would conduct exploration, construction, mining, and milling operations, and reclamation and closure at the Project in accordance with the approved 2008 Plan and subsequent amendments, which is described in the 2008 Cortez Hills Expansion Project Final EIS in pages 2-5 through 2-52 (BLM 2008) and 2011 Plan Amendment EA (BLM 2013).

For a complete description of the proposed Project, please refer to the EA, Section 2.2, Proposed Action.

Pursuant to the NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations on implementing NEPA, the EA identifies, describes, and evaluates resource protection measures that would mitigate the possible impacts of the proposed Project. The short and long-term impacts as disclosed in the EA are not considered to be significant to the human environment. The short-term impacts from implementation of the Proposed Action are local; they are not regional or national in nature. The long-term impacts resulting from the Proposed Action would be mitigated by concurrent reclamation during the life of the Project and meeting all reclamation requirements prior to closure of the Project.

## **Intensity**

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

Potential impacts to the environment as identified in Chapter 3 of the EA include the following: potential for spread of noxious weeds and invasive, non-native species within the Project Area; temporary vegetation loss; temporary wildlife habitat loss and displacement due to Project activities and human presence; impacts to special status species/habitat; and potential release of hazardous materials. Many of these impacts would be minimized by the Applicant Committed Environmental Protection Measures (ACEPMs) outlined in the approved 2008 Plan as well as by the concurrent reclamation and other measures required in the APO. BCI would continue to commit to the practices described in the approved 2008 Plan and the existing Programmatic Agreement that would prevent undue or unnecessary degradation during the life of the Project. No changes to these committed practices are proposed in this APO. However, some new applicant committed environmental protection measures (ACEPMs) have been added to this Project, as well as measures to mitigate the loss of Greater sage-grouse habitat described in item 9 below.

Travel on dirt roads and exploration/construction/mining activity within the Project Area have the potential to create fugitive dust and vehicle emissions. Fugitive dust would be controlled by minimizing surface disturbance and utilization of other ACEPMs described in Chapter 2 of the EA. The potential impacts would be temporary and would cease upon completion of the Project and successful revegetation of the surface disturbance.

The EA addresses visual resources in Chapter 3 of the EA. The impacts to visual resources by the Proposed Action would be short term. Successful reclamation of the site would minimize the linear contrasts with the natural landscapes. The Project Area is located in areas classified as Class III and Class IV, and the Project meets all of the requirements associated with those classifications.

Impacts that would be avoided or minimized by operating and reclamation measures committed to by BCI are presented in Chapter 2. Reclamation and revegetation of the Project disturbance would gradually reestablish soils, vegetative cover and wildlife habitat. None of the environmental impacts disclosed above and discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of the EA are considered significant.

Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420 and Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) 519A. Reclamation would meet its objectives as outlined in the United States Department of the Interior Solid Minerals Reclamation Handbook #H-3042-1, Surface Management of Mining Operations Handbook H-3809-1, and revegetation success standards per BLM/Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP) "Revised Guidelines for Successful Mining and Exploration Revegetation."

Under the No Action Alternative, BCI would not conduct additional surface disturbance activities, add new facilities, or expand their Project boundary from the approved 2008 Plan. BCI would continue construction and operation activities under the approved 2008 Plan.

## ***2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.***

The effects of the Proposed Action on both public health and safety would not have significant adverse impacts because BCI would be required to follow U.S. Department of Labor Mine Safety and Health Administration regulations along with maintaining all equipment and facilities in a safe and orderly manner.

Through adherence to ACEPMs, and BMPs, the Proposed Action would not result in potentially substantial or adverse impacts to public health and safety. Public safety would be maintained throughout the life of the Project. BCI would commit to the following ACEPMs to insure public health and safety:

- All equipment and other facilities would be maintained in a safe and orderly manner.
- Personnel working at the site would keep the occasional public out of operational areas.
- All sumps and other small excavations that pose a hazard or nuisance to the public, wildlife, or livestock would be adequately fenced to preclude access.
- BCI would hire a certified commercial applicator for the application of pesticides on the Project site. Existing roads within the Project boundary that are disturbed during the Proposed Action would be reclaimed, by BCI, to their pre-disturbance condition in order to provide continued public access through the area.
- Unpaved roads are and would continue to be well maintained and accommodate two-lane traffic to and from the Project Area.
- Trash and regulated wastes would be contained and hauled to an approved landfill.
- Portable chemical toilets would be used for human waste.
- Drill sites and storage yards would be located off of existing roads.
- Only nontoxic fluids would be used in the drilling process.
- Emissions of fugitive dust from disturbed surfaces would be minimized by utilizing appropriate control measures.

- Speed limits would be enforced.

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

The Project area is located in Eureka and Lander Counties, approximately 24 miles south of Beowawe, Nevada. There are no park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, and wild and scenic rivers in the vicinity.

There are known cultural resources located within the Project Area. All cultural sites will be mitigated or addressed as described in the ACEPMs described in Section 2.2.7 of the EA.

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

The Proposed Action is not expected to have effects on the quality of the human environment that are highly controversial. The parameters of the Project activities, along with associated reclamation are well established. The Project area is isolated from human habitations. Except for mineral mining, grazing, and recreation uses, the Project area is typically uninhabited.

The reclamation should return the land to its pre-mining/exploration uses of livestock grazing, mineral exploration, dispersed recreation, and wildlife habitat.

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

There are no known effects of the Proposed Action identified in the EA that are considered highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Project activities similar to what has been included in the Proposed Action have been conducted numerous times over many years on BLM-administered land and the effects are well understood. This is demonstrated through the effects analysis in Chapter 3 of the EA.

***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 will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision about a future consideration. Completion of the EA does not establish a precedent for other assessments or authorization of other development Projects including additional actions at the Project area. Any future Projects within the area or in surrounding areas will be analyzed on their own merits, independent of the actions currently selected.

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

Direct and indirect impacts of the Proposed Action were analyzed in Chapter 3 (Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences) of the EA. None of the environmental impacts

disclosed under item 1 above and discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of the EA are considered significant. Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions as identified in Chapter 2 of the EA have been considered in the cumulative impacts analysis within Chapter 3 of the EA. The cumulative impacts analysis examined all of the affected resources and all other appropriate actions within the Cumulative Effects Study Areas and determined that the Proposed Action would not incrementally contribute to any significant impacts. In addition, for any actions that might be proposed in the future, further site-specific environmental analysis, including assessment of cumulative impacts, would be required.

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

A Class III cultural resources inventory was completed and included the proposed expansion area. Cultural resource inventories identified a total of five previously recorded cultural resources within the proposed new disturbance area. All five sites have been determined not eligible for the NRHP.

Treatment protocols for mitigation of adverse effects to the Cortez Mining District posed by the currently authorized Cortez Hills Expansion Project previously were developed (Summit Envirosolutions, Inc. 2008). With the exception of the construction of a kiosk for the historic Town of Cortez, these mitigation protocols already have been completed. With implementation of the previously identified treatment measures, potential impacts to the Cortez Mining District that may result from the Proposed Action would be sufficiently mitigated.

BCI would follow the ACEPMs identified in the 2008 Cortez Hills Expansion Project Final EIS (BLM 2008, page 2-56). Through implementation of these EPMs and existing Programmatic Agreement, no appreciable impact to cultural resources is expected.

By incorporating the protection measures detailed in Section 2.2.7 of the EA, significant cumulative impacts to cultural resources are not anticipated.

***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 Endangered Species Act of 1973.***

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Nevada Natural Heritage Program (NNHP), and Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) were contacted to obtain a list of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species that have the potential to occur within the Project Area. In addition, the BLM Sensitive Species List and Special Status Species lists for the Battle Mountain District were evaluated.

The NNHP database was queried to determine the presence or absence of special status wildlife species in the area of the Proposed Action. Information from the NNHP indicates that no federally threatened or endangered plant or animal species are known to occur within the Project disturbance area.

Impacts to special status wildlife species or their habitat from the Proposed Action are analyzed in Chapter 3 Section 3.5.1 of the EA. Impacts to special status species which would occur under the Proposed Action would be minimized by the implementation of ACEPMs outlined in Chapter 2 of the EA, which include:

- In order to reduce impacts from disturbance within Greater sage-grouse preliminary general habitat (PGH), habitat restoration/enhancement would be implemented. Restoration and enhancement acreage for greater sage-grouse habitat would be calculated at 2:1 (2 acres of restoration/enhancement for every 1 acre of disturbance) for disturbance in PGH. Since piñon-juniper thinning within the Cortez Gold Mines (CGM) Operations Area is not a viable option, off site piñon-juniper- (PJ) thinning to benefit Greater sage-grouse habitat would be considered. A BLM biologist, in coordination with the Nevada Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team and NDOW, would choose a piñon-juniper thinning area analyzed in any of the following EAs for potential off site mitigation: Bald Mountain Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Project (BLM 2010, NV062-EA08-083-EA), Eagle Butte Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Project (BLM 2011, DOI-BLM-NV-B010-2011-0021-EA), and Toiyabe West Wildlife Enhancement Project (BLM 2013, DOI-BLM-NV-B010-2013-0020-EA). These EAs identified and assessed crucial Greater sage-grouse habitat where piñon-juniper thinning projects would be beneficial due to piñon-juniper encroachment into sagebrush communities. BLM, the Nevada Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team, and NDOW, would choose piñon-juniper thinning projects located within the Greater sage-grouse Population Management Unit nearest to the CGM Operations Area and analyzed in one of the EAs. Any off site mitigation plan would be provided to BLM for approval. BCI would implement restoration/enhancement measures within 2 years of the proposed disturbance-related activities. Completed measures would be reported in the annual disturbance report that is provided to the BLM and NDEP by April 15th each year. Impacts associated with the offsite mitigation areas were addressed in the corresponding EAs; therefore, no additional NEPA analysis would be required for this mitigation option.
- As outlined in the 2013 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Regarding the Establishment of a Partnership for the Conservation and Protection of the Greater sage-grouse and Greater sage-grouse habitat, payment may be made into a Greater sage-grouse mitigation bank account. The Nevada Standardized Reclamation Cost Estimator (SRCE) model would provide the basis for negotiating costs for public lands.
- Prior to ground disturbing activities, dark kangaroo mouse surveys would be conducted in areas of potentially suitable habitat, with survey results submitted to the BLM.

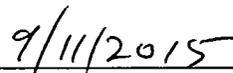
The action complies with the Endangered Species Act, in that potential effects of this decision on listed species have been analyzed and documented. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973, as amended.

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

The Proposed Action will not violate or threaten to violate any federal, state, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.



Jon D. Sherve  
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Date