

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

### **Gold Acquisition Corporation Relief Canyon Mine Expansion Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-NV-W010-2015-0037-EA**

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Based on the interdisciplinary analysis conducted in the Relief Canyon Mine Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-W010-2015-0037-EA dated July 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 Relief Canyon Mine Expansion is not required.

Though the Finding of No Significant Impact is not dependent on mitigation, recommendations were developed in section 4.1.4 of the EA that, if implemented, would reduce impacts to special status species. These recommendations are consolidated in section 5.0 of the EA.

I have determined that the Proposed Action is in conformance with the Winnemucca District Planning Area Resource Management Plan 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). 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**

Gold Acquisition Corporation (GAC), a wholly owned subsidiary of Pershing Gold Corporation, submitted an amended Plan of Operations for their Relief Canyon Mine proposing to expand operations on private and public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The Relief Canyon Mine is located approximately 17.5 miles east-northeast of Lovelock, in Pershing County, Nevada.

Specifically, GAC proposes the following major components:

- Expand the footprint of the existing pit area by approximately 68.3 acres (41.2 public, 27.1 private);
- Develop a new waste rock storage area (Waste Rock Area 5) on 95.7 acres of private land;

- Improve the closure design for the previously existing heap leach pads (Pads 1-5) by adding approximately three feet of overburden and waste rock as a cover;
- Drill one or more new water supply wells as necessary to augment or replace the existing wells which will be impacted by mining activities;
- Install additional piezometers as necessary to augment the existing array or replace some piezometers which will be impacted by mining activities;
- Improve site communications by installing radio repeater hardware;
- Add wireless links to the production wells, crushing systems and process plant;
- Construct new growth media stockpiles, diversion ditches for storm water control, and reconfigure certain roads necessary for the expanded facilities;
- Construct new exploration drill roads and sites;
- Construct an on-site analytical laboratory;
- Construct a new truck shop, truck wash, fueling facilities, and ready line;
- Construct storage areas for hazardous waste and petroleum contaminated waste;
- Construct new reagent and fuel storage areas;
- Construct additional parking;
- Construct a potable water system;
- Develop a new on-site Class III landfill that will be integrated into Waste Rock Storage Area 5;
- Additional or reconfigured fencing; and
- Additional electrical generators.

Past BLM authorizations have approved up to 622.5 acres of surface disturbance at the Relief Canyon Mine, with 396.9 acres currently in use. The proposed modification will result in 211.8 acres of new disturbance on previously authorized acreage. The proposed uses of the new disturbance will differ from what was originally authorized but will not increase the total disturbance authorized. As a result of the Proposed Action, the total surface disturbance on public lands would be approximately 608.7 acres.

### **Intensity**

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

The EA considered possible beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed project. Benefits to the local communities would be through employment of the local mining work force, and use of local retail services, restaurants, and lodging are possible throughout the life of the project.

Adverse impacts would include removal of vegetation and an increase in noise and activity levels that would decrease available habitat for special status wildlife species. The recommended mitigation measures would help to reduce these impacts. Upon completion of the mining activities, most surface disturbances would be recontoured and revegetated. Long-term impacts

to the area would include approximately 21.4 acres of unreclaimed surface disturbance from the open pit.

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

Mining activities are not expected to cause adverse public health effects. The Relief Canyon Mine includes a Contingency Plan and Emergency Procedures, Petroleum Contaminated Soils Plan, Solid and Hazardous Waste Management Plan, Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure Plan, a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan, and Dark-Sky Measures. Safety requirements 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 affects 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 mining activity have been surveyed and evaluated for historic and/or cultural resources. No National Register eligible properties are 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 activities are not new to Nevada or Pershing County. Issues and concerns brought forward through the NEPA process were taken into consideration for analysis in preparing the Preliminary EA. Concerns raised on the Preliminary EA have been addressed in the final EA. No controversial issues remain.

*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 mining 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 mining activities have been commonly applied for several decades in various phases of mining.

*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. The Cumulative Effects Study Areas (CESAs) analyzed the potential effects to migratory birds, soils, special status species, vegetation, general wildlife, rangeland management, water resources, air quality, geology and minerals, and Socioeconomics<sup>4</sup>. Detailed analyses of these areas were conducted to assess the potential cumulative impacts. Through these analyses it was determined that no significant cumulative impacts would result from the proposed action.

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.*

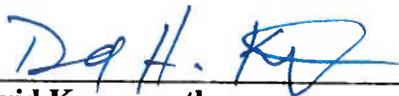
The proposed action would have no adverse effects to cultural or historic resources. No National Register eligible properties are present within the plan of operations boundary.

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 and any Decision regarding this proposed project would stipulate that the operator must obtain all necessary approvals from other federal, state, and local agencies before proceeding with the proposed action. The BLM would conduct at least four inspections at the Relief Canyon Mine each year to ensure compliance with the approved plan of operations. Additionally, the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection would make regular inspections pertaining to the reclamation permit.



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**Date**