

***Draft* PROPOSED GOAT MOUNTAIN
HARDROCK MINERAL PROSPECTING
PERMIT APPLICATIONS**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with authority at 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 3505, the BLM has the responsibility for management of the federal mineral estate and the responsibility to implement regulations for minerals available and subject to prospecting and exploration. Ascot USA, Inc. (Ascot), a Canadian-based corporation incorporated in the State of Washington, has submitted two Hardrock Prospecting Permit Applications for Goat Mountain to the Bureau of Land Management, for associated exploratory drilling (Proposed Action/ Alternative 3), on US Forest Service (USFS) land within the Gifford Pinchot National Forest (GPNF). The Permit Application Areas are within portions of Sections 7, 8, 9, 16, 17, 18, and 19 of Township 10 North, Range 6 East, Willamette Meridian, Skamania County, Washington. The Project Area is located on and adjacent to the south facing slope of Goat Mountain, approximately 12 miles northeast of Mount St. Helens.

PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of this action is for the USFS and BLM to respond to two applications for Hardrock Prospecting Permits submitted by Ascot to carry out mineral prospecting within MS- 708, 774, 779, 1329, and 1330. The BLM, in cooperation and with the consent of the USFS-GPNF, must either deny the permits, issue the permits as proposed in the applications and the associated Exploration Plan, or issue the permits with additional stipulations. If consent is given, the USFS would also specify stipulations for use and protection of National Forest System lands.

In order to process the Prospecting Permit Applications, the BLM and the USFS jointly prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) consistent with the December 2011, Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in which Ascot, the USFS, and the BLM defined procedures and responsibilities for completing the EA. Three alternatives were analyzed in the EA: Alternative 1, the No Action Alternative; Alternative 2, the Proposed Action; and, Alternative 3, the Alternative Based on Scoping Comments.

Both Agencies will base their respective decisions on the information, issues and effects analysis presented in the inter-agency EA. As the surface management agency, the USFS will use the analysis to decide whether or not to consent to BLM issuing a prospecting permit containing 898 acres of acquired National Forest System lands for exploration of hardrock minerals including

copper, molybdenum, silver, gold, and associated minerals and to determine that the exploration activity would not interfere with the primary purposes for which the lands were acquired. The proposed activity must also be consistent with the Gifford Pinchot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended.

Based on the context and intensity of the impacts analyzed in the EA, I have determined that Alternative 3, the Alternative Based on Scoping Comments is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. I considered the following criteria, suggested by CEQ (40 CFR 1508.27(b)), for evaluating the intensity or severity of the impact of the Proposed Goat Mountain Hardrock Mineral Prospecting Permit Applications.

The action with the mitigations and limitations described in Alternative 3 will:

1. Not result in significant beneficial or adverse effects.

The proposed exploration will provide additional information regarding the existence, grade and extent of sub-surface hardrock minerals within the area of exploration. The environmental effects of the associated disturbance on soils, hydrology, vegetation, species and species habitats are anticipated to be minimal or undetectable. Effects will be temporary and all areas of surface disturbance will be rehabilitated. The additional timing limitations under Alternative 3 will avoid impacts to northern spotted owl habitat and recreationist utilizing the Green River Horse Camp during the period of peak use.

2. Not result in significant impacts on public health or safety.

Public access to drill sites in the northern portion of the Project Area would be limited during active drilling through the use of a temporary locking gate. Drill pads on active FS roads would be housed in a drill shack. Signs would be placed instructing the public to stay away from the drill shack and area beyond the gate. The proposed project design features provide reasonable protection of public health and safety while maintaining existing access to public lands.

3. Have no significant, adverse effects on unique characteristics of the geographic area.

The EA identified unique resources in proximity of the area of exploration. These include the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, segment of the Green River determined eligible under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and an Inventoried Roadless Area. These areas are unaffected by the proposed prospecting activities.

4. Not have highly controversial environmental effects.

“Highly controversial” in the context of 40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4), refers to substantial disagreement within the scientific community about the environmental effects of the proposed action. It does not refer to expressions of opposition or support, or to

differences of opinion concerning how public lands should be managed. Public scoping identified a wide range of opinions and substantial public interest in the project. However, it did not identify substantial disagreement about the nature and extent of potential impacts.

5. **Not have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or unique or unknown environmental risks.**

The survey and analytical methodologies utilized by the agencies to describe the affected environment and environmental effects follow established practices. The EA did not identify any environmental effects or environmental risks that could not be described using available tools and methodologies.

6. **Not establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.**

Extraction of the drill core geologic samples for analysis and study would provide information needed to make sound decisions regarding possible future exploration and/or the economic value and viability of the mineral resources within the project area. This information could be utilized to support future applications for mineral leasing in the project area. Any future development would be subject to environmental analysis and public comment under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). No leasing applications are pending within the project area at this time.

7. **Not result in significant cumulative environmental effects.**

No other applications for new resource use proposals or authorizations are pending within the geographic area of the proposed permit.

8. **Have no significant effects on scientific, cultural, or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.**

The areas of disturbance proposed in the permit applications are limited to previously disturbed locations. Cultural resource surveys have not identified any cultural or historic resources that would be impacted by the proposed prospecting activities.

9. **Have no significant adverse effects on species listed or proposed to be listed as Federally Endangered or Threatened Species, or their designated critical habitat.**

The Northern spotted owl was the only federally listed or proposed to be listed as Federally Endangered or Threatened Species suspected to be present in the vicinity of the action. Impacts to northern spotted owls are addressed in the project-specific Biological Assessment (URS 2012, EA Appendix E) and summarized here. There is potentially suitable habitat in the mature timber stand around or adjacent to drill Pads 10, 11, 12, 13, 22, 23, 24, and 25. The exploration activities would occur at the edge of the suitable

habitat along existing decommissioned roads to be temporarily reactivated. It is estimated that approximately 68 trees would be removed along the edge of suitable habitat. However, no trees greater than a 12-inch dbh would be removed; therefore, the suitability of the habitat would be unchanged. While there have been no surveys to indicate whether spotted owls occur nearby, it may be assumed that the habitat is occupied. Equipment noise, lights, and activity may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect northern spotted owls. The young second-growth habitat lower in elevation in the Project Area is not suitable habitat for northern spotted owls. To avoid potential noise-related disturbance to northern spotted owls, which may utilize the mature forest in the northern portion of the Project Area, limits on operations between February 28 and July 1 are proposed. No loud noise producing activities, such as road reactivation or drilling activities would occur in or adjacent to the late successional forest stands in the northern upper elevations of the Project Area between February 28 and July 1. No designated Critical Habitat is within the action area.

10. Not Violate a Federal, State, Local, or Tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment.

The action is in conformance with multiple management objectives and decisions of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest Plan. Specific decisions include those from:

- *The 1994 Northwest Forest Plan as Amended.* In 1994 the Gifford Pinchot Forest Plan was amended with the completion of a comprehensive and long-term policy for the management of USFS and BLM lands within the range of the northern spotted owl.
- *The 1994 Northwest Forest Plan and Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) Objectives*, requires that proposed projects on Federal lands must be consistent with the ACS Objectives.
- *The 1994 Northwest Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines for riparian reserves.*
- *Gifford Pinchot National Forest, Land and Resource Management Plan, 1999.* Management Area categories in the larger permitted area include: unroaded recreation, visual emphasis (Visual Quality Objectives), and (nominated) Wild and Scenic Rivers (Green River).
- *Gifford Pinchot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Management Indicator Species List.*
- *Gifford Pinchot National Forest Survey and Manage Species List.*
- *USFS Sensitive Species (USFS 2011).*
- *USFS Special Status Plant Species data in the Project Area.*
- *USFS Region 6 Regional Forester Special Status Species List, December 1, 2011.* Includes Region 6 Regional Forester Sensitive Species List.

Also,

- *Magnuson-Stevens Act Provision: Essential Fish Habitat (EFH): Final Rule (50 CFR Part 600; 67 FR 2376).*

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have determined the Goat Mountain Hardrock Mineral Prospecting Permits do not constitute major Federal actions having a significant effect on the human environment; and that an environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared. This conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's criteria for significance (40 CFR § 1508.27(b)), with regard to impacts described in the EA, my understanding of the project, review of project analysis, and review of public comments. The analysis of effects documented in the EA has been completed within the context of multiple spatial and temporal scales and within the context of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest Plan, as amended and the specific plans and program guidance listed above.

Signature: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____