

Finding of No Significant Impact

Golden Arrow Exploration Project

NEPA DOI-BLM-NV-B020-2015-0060-EA; Case File N-93516

I have reviewed Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-B020-2015-0060-EA dated February 2016. After consideration of the environmental effects as described in the EA, and incorporated herein, I have determined that the Proposed Action 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 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required to be prepared per section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

DOI-BLM-NV-B020-2015-0060-EA has been reviewed through the interdisciplinary team process, and has been sent to the Nevada State Clearinghouse and the public for a 30-day comment period.

After considering 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, I have determined that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment.

I have determined that the Proposed Action is in conformance with the approved 1997 Tonopah Resource Management Plan as amended by the Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-Grouse (GRSG) Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment and Record of Decision – September 2015 (GRSG Plan Amendment), and is consistent with applicable plans and policies of neighboring local, county, state, tribal and federal agencies and governments.

Context:

The BLM Tonopah Field Office (TFO) has prepared an EA to analyze the effects of Intor Resources Corporation (IRC) conducting the proposed Golden Arrow Exploration Project (Project), consisting of exploration drilling and related activities. The Project Area is located on public lands approximately 60 miles east of Tonopah, Nye County, Nevada, in parts of Sections 8, 16 through 22, 27, and 28, Township 2 North (T2N), Range 48 East (R48E), Mount Diablo Base and Meridian. It can be accessed from Tonopah by traveling approximately 40 miles east on US Highway 6, then south on Golden Arrow-Silver Bow Road for approximately nine miles to either of two access roads.

IRC had been conducting exploration activities in the Project Area resulting in about nine acres of surface disturbance, under three Notices of Intent to Conduct Prospecting Operations (NOI) which have since expired. IRC submitted a Plan of Operations to BLM (BLM case file N-93516) to seek authorization to expand activities beyond the NOI disturbance threshold for Project activities that would result in surface disturbance of about 91 additional acres, or a total of 100 acres in the Project Area. These activities would be conducted in phases, with Phase 1 involving approximately 25.6 acres of surface disturbance.

Proposed Action activities include reverse circulation (RC) and/or core drilling; widening roads; constructing drill sites with sumps; a laydown area; geologic and geophysical mapping; overland travel; constructing trenches for the collection of bulk samples and ground condition testing;

potentially installing and operating ground water monitoring wells and production well test sites; geotechnical test pits, trenches, and corings; potentially installing and operating a meteorological station; and reclaiming Project-related surface disturbance.

For a complete description of the Project see the EA, Section 2.0, Proposed Action and Alternatives.

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

Intensity:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The EA identified resources that could potentially be affected, and analyzed the likely intensity of these effects. The Proposed Action (EA Chapter 2) incorporates environmental protection measures (EPM), best management practices (BMPs), a reclamation plan, and other project design features to minimize these effects. Potential impacts disclosed in EA Chapter 3 include the following:

Air quality would potentially be affected by vehicle and equipment emissions, in amounts that may be considered inconsequential; and by fugitive dust emissions from surface disturbance and vehicle travel on dirt roads, which would be minimized by applying water. The Project would adhere to a Dust Control Plan in a required Surface Area Disturbance permit from the Nevada Bureau of Air Pollution Control. See EA section 2.2.1. EPMs and BMPs would also limit soil erosion and reduce sediment runoff from the disturbed areas. Topsoil would be set aside and used for restoration, possibly resulting in some mixing of soils and loss of soil characteristics. Restoration would return the site to pre-project topography (section 3.2.13). The measures to limit erosion and sedimentation would protect surface water quality, along with a Spill Contingency Plan for petroleum products (section 3.2.18).

Cultural resources were identified within an identified Area of Potential Effects (APE) for direct effects that encompasses the entire Project Area, and an APE for indirect effects that extends for a one mile radius beyond. One historic property was found that may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; this site would not be affected, because it would be flagged, fenced and avoided. If IRC discovers cultural resources, all work within 100 meters will be stopped and BLM will be contacted. See EA section 3.2.2, and items 3 and 8 below.

Migratory birds (EA section 3.2.6) may be displaced to undisturbed suitable habitat outside the project area, and would undergo temporary, phased loss of 100 acres of habitat until reclamation. IRC is committed to providing a qualified biologist to conduct nest surveys prior to any surface disturbance during the breeding season, and to avoiding any nests.

There would also be temporary displacement and loss of 100 acres of habitat/forage for livestock, wild horses, and wildlife including BLM Sensitive species with potential habitat in the project area. Sumps would be sloped so that animals could easily exit. Mechanized

ground-disturbing activity could cause direct mortality to some small mammals and reptiles. See EA sections 3.2.10, 3.2.14, 3.2.19, 3.2.20, and item 9 below. Vegetation loss would be temporary, with reclamation and reseeding concurrent with project work to the extent feasible (3.2.15).

Surface disturbance would have the potential to create conditions favoring the spread and establishment of noxious weeds and invasive, non-native plant species (EA section 3.2.8). EPMs outlined in section 2.1.11 would minimize this likelihood; and IRC would coordinate with BLM to manage any new weed populations detected.

Project activities and a temporary workforce of up to eight employees or contractors would contribute to short-term, minor traffic increases and positive economic effects (EA sections 3.2.5, 3.2.12).

In terms of visual resources, there would be moderate, temporary contrasts of line and color with the natural landscape, well within the parameters of the Visual Resource Management Class IV objective which allows major changes to the landscape (EA section 3.2.16).

Reclamation would be completed to the standards described in 43 CFR 3809.420 and Nevada Administrative Code 519A; objectives outlined in the U.S. Department of the Interior Solid Minerals Reclamation handbook #H-3042-1 and Surface Management of Mining Operations handbook H-3809-01; and revegetation success standards per BLM/Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP) "Revised Guidelines for Successful Mining and Exploration Revegetation."

2. The degree to which the Proposed Action affects public health or safety.

The Proposed Action addresses public safety issues within the context of the Project. The applicant-committed measures and other design features include provisions committing IRC to maintaining equipment, facilities and vehicles in safe and orderly condition; repairing any damage to existing roads; keeping vehicles to appropriate speeds; sloping sumps for easy egress; and fencing or signing any existing open mine shafts at the site. See EA sections 2.1.1 and 3.2.9. Also, IRC would comply with BLM, NDEP, and Mine Safety and Health Administration regulations for employee and public safety.

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.

There are no park lands, prime farmlands, or wild and scenic rivers in the Project Area vicinity. Based on the results of the Class III cultural resources inventory of the Area of Potential Effects, BLM identified one historic property that may be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). To prevent impacts to this unevaluated site, IRC would avoid it, ensuring it is mapped and flagged by a qualified cultural resource specialist with a GPS unit prior to surface disturbing activities.

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

The Proposed Action is not expected to have highly controversial effects on the quality of the human environment. The parameters of the exploration and reclamation activities are well established. The reclamation would return the land to its pre-exploration uses,

including livestock grazing, mineral exploration, dispersed recreation, and wildlife and wild horse habitat.

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

There are no anticipated effects of the Proposed Action that are considered highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Similar activities have been authorized and conducted on BLM-administered lands over many years, and the effects are well understood, as documented in 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 nor represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. The EA does not establish a precedent for other actions, nor would a decision based on the analysis constitute authorization of any other actions within or beyond the Project Area. Any future projects would be analyzed on their own merits, independent of other preceding or current actions or decisions, other than considering the actions' cumulative impacts (see item 7 below).

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 as documented in EA Chapter 3. I find that none of the impacts disclosed above and discussed in detail in chapter 3 are significant. With implementation of EPMS, BMPs and restoration, impacts are variously localized, minimized, and/or temporary. Chapter 4, Cumulative Impacts Analysis, considers the project's incremental contributions to impacts resulting from other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions, when and where they may overlap in time and place. I find that, considered together, these actions do not result in a cumulatively significant impact. The Proposed Action's incremental contribution to cumulative impacts are expected to be minimal for all resources analyzed. For socioeconomic effects, the minimal contribution to cumulative impacts would be beneficial.

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 historical resources.

No districts, sites, highways, structure of objects in the Project's Area of Potential Effects are listed in the NRHP. Only one may be eligible for listing in the NRHP, based on the results of the Class III cultural resources inventory of the Area of Potential Effects, as noted in item 3 above. To prevent impacts to this unevaluated site, IRC would ensure it is mapped and flagged and would avoid it during surface disturbing activities. The Proposed Action also includes IRC's commitment to observe the regulations at 43 CFR 10.4(g), and Section VI.C. of the State Protocol Agreement between BLM and the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office for Implementing the National Historic Preservation Act: IRC would notify the BLM Authorized Officer on discovery of human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony and would immediately stop all activities within 100 meters of the discovery, and not recommence work within this location until a notice to proceed is issued by the BLM authorized officer. IRC would not knowingly disturb, alter, injure, or

destroy any scientifically important paleontological deposits. In the event that previously undiscovered paleontological resources are discovered by IRC in the performance of any surface disturbing activities, the item(s) or condition(s) would be left intact and immediately brought to the attention of the authorized officer of the BLM. If significant paleontological resources are found, avoidance, recordation, and/or data recovery would be required.

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 of 1973.

In 2014 The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Nevada Natural Heritage Program (NNHP), and Nevada Department of Wildlife were queried regarding threatened, endangered, and sensitive species that have the potential to occur within the Project Area. The NNHP indicated no such species with that potential. The USFWS reported the following may be affected by Project activities: southwestern willow flycatcher (entire population), an Endangered species; yellow-billed cuckoo (Western US Distinct Population Segment), a Threatened species; and greater sage-grouse (GRSG) (entire population), which was at that time a Candidate species. In September 2015, USFWS made a determination to remove greater sage-grouse from the Candidate list (USFWS 2015). No riparian habitat or perennial drainages exist within the Project Area; therefore, it has no suitable habitat for southwestern willow flycatcher or yellow-billed cuckoo.

The most recent Nevada BLM Sensitive Species List was also evaluated to determine if any of the species had the potential to occur within the Project Area. The NNHP indicated there may be potential habitat for Nevada dune beardtongue, bashful beardtongue, and pale kangaroo mouse. Biological surveys further refined known or likely presence/absence of sensitive species and their habitats. BLM biologists identified additional BLM Sensitive species that occur (several cacti) or have potential habitat (dark kangaroo mouse, burrowing owl, loggerhead shrike and several bat species) in the project area. GRSG is also BLM Sensitive, and BLM's 2015 GRSG Plan Amendment maps identified approximately 78 acres of the project area as within OHMA, defined as containing seasonal or connectivity habitat areas for GRSG; no project work is currently proposed in OHMA. All applicable Required Design Features from the GRSG Plan Amendment were incorporated into the Proposed Action with specific direction for applying them to this Project if work is later proposed within OHMA, as were any other design features needed to minimize effects to the other BLM Sensitive species or their potential habitats. See EA section 3.2.14.

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's relationship to other laws, policies and plans was considered throughout the EA. It would not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Signed:


Timothy J. Coward
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Office

5/11/2015