DEQ
Montana Department of Environmental Quality

Air, Energy & Mining Division

ENDOMINES IDAHO, LLC

EXPLORATION LICENSE NO. 00907

Amendment No. 1

KEARSAGE EXPLORATION PROJECT
MADISON COUNTY, MT

October 26, 2026
Draft Environmental Assessment

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

COMPANY NAME: Endomines Idaho, LLC.
EA DATE: October 26, 2026
PROJECT: Kearsage Exploration Project
PERMIT/LICENSE: Exploration License No. 00907
AMENDMENT #: Amendment 1 (AMD1)

Location

(45.21719°, -111.93173°) County: Madison

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP: FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ PRIVATE ☒

Compliance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act

Under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), Montana agencies are required to prepare an environmental review for state actions that may have an impact on the human environment. The proposed action is considered to be a state action that may have an impact on the human environment, and therefore, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) must prepare an environmental review. This Environmental Assessment (EA) will examine the proposed action and alternatives to the proposed action and disclose potential impacts that may result from the proposed and alternative actions. DEQ will determine the need for additional environmental review based on consideration of the criteria set forth in Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) 17.4.608. DEQ may not withhold, deny, or impose conditions on the permit based on the information contained in this Environmental Assessment. § 75-1-201(4), Montana Code Annotated (MCA).

Proposed Action

DEQ would approve Amendment 1 (AMD1) to Exploration License No. 00907 (Exploration License) for Endomines Idaho, LLC. (Applicant) – Kearsage Exploration Project, if DEQ has determined that the Applicant has met the criteria set forth in 82-4-332, MCA. If approved, the license to conduct exploration activities would be granted for a period of one year, at which time the Applicant could renew the Exploration License annually.

Purpose and Need

DEQ's purpose and need in conducting this environmental review is to act upon the Applicant's application for an Exploration License Amendment to conduct mineral exploration activities in compliance with the Metal Mine Reclamation Act (MMRA) (Sections 82-4-301, et seq., MCA). On August 13, 2026, the Applicant submitted a complete application for an Exploration License Amendment (AMD1). Pursuant to 82-4-332(2), MCA, the application was complete and acceptable.

The Applicant proposes this action to conduct exploration drilling methods on private land located in Madison County, Montana, at the Kearsage Exploration Project site, approximately 6 miles south of Virginia City, Montana.

The Plan of Operations proposes a diamond core drilling exploration program consisting of up to 16 drill holes from 14 drill pads. Proposed drill-hole depths range from 500 to 1,400 feet, for a combined total drilled depth of up to 14,900 feet. Each drill pad would provide approximately 50 feet by 30 feet of working space and would be field-fitted to minimize construction and surface disturbance. Internal drill sumps would be constructed within the drill-pad footprints and would measure approximately 15 feet long by 6 feet wide by 8 feet deep.

Access to the drill sites would use approximately 10,632 feet of existing private roads, approximately 10 feet wide, requiring brushing and grading. The Applicant also proposes construction of approximately 865 feet of new temporary roads, with an average disturbance width of approximately 35 feet and an excavated maximum depth of 6 feet. No overland travel is identified in the plan. The Applicant estimates approximately 3.12 acres of total surface disturbance.

Start dates of the proposed exploration activities are contingent upon DEQs acceptance of the required reclamation bond and issuance of an Approval to Proceed Letter. The Applicant proposes to complete reclamation within eight months of completing the proposed exploration operations. Final reclamation of all exploration-related disturbances must be completed no later than two years following the conclusion of exploration activities unless otherwise incorporated into an Operating Permit.

Table 1: Summary of Activities Proposed in Application

Summary of Proposed Activities in Application	
General Overview	Endomines Idaho LLC proposes exploration drilling activities on private lands located in Sections 14 and 23, Township 07 South, Range 3 West, located in Madison County, Montana, 6 miles south of Virginia City, MT. The proposed action includes drilling up to 16 holes from 14 drill pads. Proposed drill holes would not exceed a maximum of 1,400 feet from the surface. The combined total drilled depth of all holes would not exceed 14,900 feet. The drill pads would be constructed approximately 50 feet long by 30 feet wide, with a maximum excavated depth of 13 feet, and would contain an internal drill sump, approximately 15 feet long by 6 feet wide, with an approximate depth of 8 feet. The Applicant has proposed to utilize up to 10,632 feet of existing private roads, which would require brushing and grading of the traveling surface, up to 10 feet wide. The Applicant also proposes the construction of approximately 865 feet of new temporary roads, up to 35 feet wide, and an excavated maximum depth of 6 feet. The Applicant is proposing up to 3.12 acres of surface disturbance. Start dates of the proposed exploration activities are contingent upon DEQs acceptance of the required reclamation bond and issuance of an Approval to Proceed Letter. The Applicant proposes to complete reclamation within eight months of completing the proposed exploration operations. Final reclamation of all exploration-related disturbances must be completed no later than two years following the conclusion of exploration activities unless otherwise incorporated into an Operating Permit.
Proposed Dimensions	
Drill pads (#)	14
Drill pad dimensions (xyz)	50 feet by 30 feet by up to 13 feet
Drill sumps (#)	14
Drill sumps (xyz)	15 feet by 6 feet by 8 feet
Drill Holes (#)	16
New Roads (xyz)	865 feet by 35 feet by 6 feet

Existing Road Improvements (xy)	10,632 feet by 10 feet
Maximum Drill Hole Depth (z)	1,400 feet
Total Drill Hole Footage (z)	14,900 feet
Total new surface disturbance	**3.12 acres**
Specific Proposed Activities	
Duration and timing	Start dates of the proposed exploration activities are contingent upon DEQs acceptance of the required reclamation bond and issuance of an Approval to Proceed Letter. Work hours are estimated to be up to 24 hours per day (2 x 12-hour shifts), up to 7 days per week. The Applicant proposes to complete reclamation within eight months of completing the proposed exploration operations. Final reclamation of all surface disturbances must be completed no later than 2 years following the conclusion of exploration activities.
Equipment	Exploration and Reclamation operations would be completed with the following equipment, or similar: • 1 – Truck-mounted Drill Rig (Atlas Copco CS4002) • 1 – Drill Core Power Pack (10 feet by 3 feet) • 1 – Portable Rod storage (11 feet by 5 feet) • 1 – Skid Steer Loader/Forklift (Cat 272D) • 1 – Water Truck (6,000-gallon tandem axle truck) • 2 – ATVs (model not provided) • 5 – Pickup Trucks (model not provided) • 1 – Diesel Light Plant (MLT4060KVLED)
Location and analysis area	**Location:** 45.21719°, -111.93173° **Distance from the nearest town/city:** On private lands in Sections 14 and 23, Township 07 South, Range 3 West, located in Madison County, Montana **Analysis Area:** The area being analyzed for this environmental review includes the immediate project area, immediate downstream water sources, and neighboring lands surrounding the analysis area within a reasonable distance for the impacts being considered. Refer to the Location Map and any other maps below.
Personnel on-site	• 2 – Lead Drillers • 2 – Assistant Drillers • 2 – Driller Helpers

	• 1 – Equipment Operator • 3 – Geologists • 1 – Corporate Project Oversight
Structures	• 2 – 500-gallon Water Bladders • 1 - Portable Toilets • 1 – trash can
Proposed action water source	The Applicant proposes to obtain water for drilling from an existing developed spring located in Section 26, Township 6 South, Range 3 West, or any other legally available water source. The Applicant states that water would be hauled to the drill sites using a tandem-axle truck equipped with a 6,000-gallon portable water tank. Approximately 20,000 gallons of water per day would be used for drilling operations, sample recovery, and dust control, which may require up to 4 round trips per day to the drill site.
Air quality	The Applicant proposes that if fugitive dust is observed, water would be applied to roads. The Applicant is required to comply with the applicable local, county, state, and federal requirements pertaining to air quality.
Supplemental Lighting	The Applicant proposes that a portable light plant would be used from during nighttime operations and other periods of insufficient natural light. To minimize fugitive light from leaving the drill pads during night operations, the Applicant proposes to implement Best Management Practices (BMPs), such as downward-facing lights.
Water quality	To minimize sediment transport from the drill pads, the Applicant proposes the following BMPs: vegetated buffers, earthen berms, silt fencing and spill prevention and response kits. The Applicant is required to comply with the applicable local, county, state, and federal requirements pertaining to water quality.
Erosion control and sediment transport	To minimize sediment transport from the drill pads, the Applicant has proposed the use of the following BMPs: vegetated buffers, earthen berms, silt fencing, and spill prevention and response kits. The Applicant is required to comply with the applicable local, county, state, and federal requirements pertaining to water quality.
Solid waste	The Applicant proposes that any solid wastes produced by the operation would be stored in one trash can and hauled off-site for disposal at the Madison County Landfill in Virginia City, MT, on a regular basis. The Applicant is required to comply with the applicable local, county, state, and federal requirements pertaining to the disposal of solid waste material.
Cultural resources	The Applicant proposes that, if any historic, cultural or archaeological resources are encountered, contact would be made with the landowner. The Applicant would work with the landowner to determine the appropriate measures to implement. The

	Applicant is required to comply with the applicable local, county, state, and federal requirements pertaining to cultural resources.
Hazardous substances	To minimize the release of hazardous substances from the drill pads, the Applicant has proposed the use of secondary containment as Best Management Practices (BMPs). The Applicant proposes: • 50 gallons of diesel fuel and 10 gallons of gasoline would be transported in a pickup-mounted fuel tank to the drill pad on a daily basis. • 10 gallons of grease or other lubricants would be stored on the fuel/service truck. • Spill prevention and response kits The Applicant must adhere to all applicable local, county, state, and federal regulations concerning hazardous substances.
Reclamation Plans	**Concurrent Reclamation:** The Applicant proposes to reclaim drill pads concurrently as drilling is completed. Each drill hole would be plugged upon completion and before the drill rig relocates to the next drill site, in accordance with ARM 17.24.106. Drill holes that encounter groundwater would be filled with swelling bentonite clay to prevent potential cross-contamination of aquifers, with a cement plug installed in the upper 5–10 feet. Dry drill holes would be grouted from the bottom to within 5–10 feet of the surface, with a cement plug installed above the grout. Drill cuttings would be returned to the drill hole as part of plugging. The plan anticipates that one drill pad may remain unreclaimed at the close of the drilling season, which would require prior authorization from DEQ. Before seasonal demobilization, consumable materials, other items, and contractor equipment would be removed from the site. **Final Reclamation:** The Applicant proposes that final reclamation would include regrading drill sites as needed to reestablish the running width of existing roads. Disturbed areas extending beyond the road prism would be regraded and seeded. Water in drill sumps would be allowed to evaporate before excavated material is placed back into the sumps; the areas would then be graded to match the surrounding topography and promote runoff away from the sump locations. All sump-reclamation areas would be seeded following final grading. New temporary roads would be fully reclaimed upon completion of their use. Equipment and supplies would be removed before reclamation activities begin, and broadcast seeding would use a seed mixture acceptable to the landowner. **Weed Control Plan:** The Applicant proposes to clean all tracked and wheeled equipment off-site before mobilization to minimize the

	introduction and spread of noxious weeds through soil and debris. Following reclamation, the Applicant would review each reclaimed site annually for three years and treat weeds on disturbed areas as needed.
	Cumulative Impact Considerations
General setting	The project area features forest and woodland, interspersed with mountain big sagebrush shrubland and montane grassland and meadows. Smaller areas of exposed rock, cliff and scree, wetland and riparian vegetation are also present. Many existing roads and previously mined and reclaimed sites are also present within the analyzed area.
Past actions	Past actions in the area include periodic mining of placer and lode deposits from 1863 to the present. More recently, several Small Miner Exclusions (SMES) were operated within the greater project area, including SMES Nos. 25-192 and 25-217, each of which has a status of inactive, and 25-210, with a closed status. Closed or Inactive Exploration Licenses in the greater project area include Nos. 00414 and 00743. No Operating Permits were operated within the greater project area.
Present actions	**Current Operations:** SMES No. 25-249 and Exploration License No. 00560 are active within the greater project area. Project water would be sourced from a developed spring located in Section 26, Township 6 South, Range 3 West, at the US Grant site, an active Small Miner Exclusion (SMES No. 25-237) **Other:** Many pre-existing access roads are present on public and private lands. Local traffic exists on the existing public and private roads, including Alder Gulch Road, Favorite Gulch Road and Bachelor Gulch Road.
Related future actions	The Applicant may submit additional applications to amend the exploration license, which DEQ would review pursuant to the MMRA and rules adopted under the MMRA at that time. Any subsequent approvals would undergo a separate environmental review under MEPA.

Figure 1: General Project Location Map

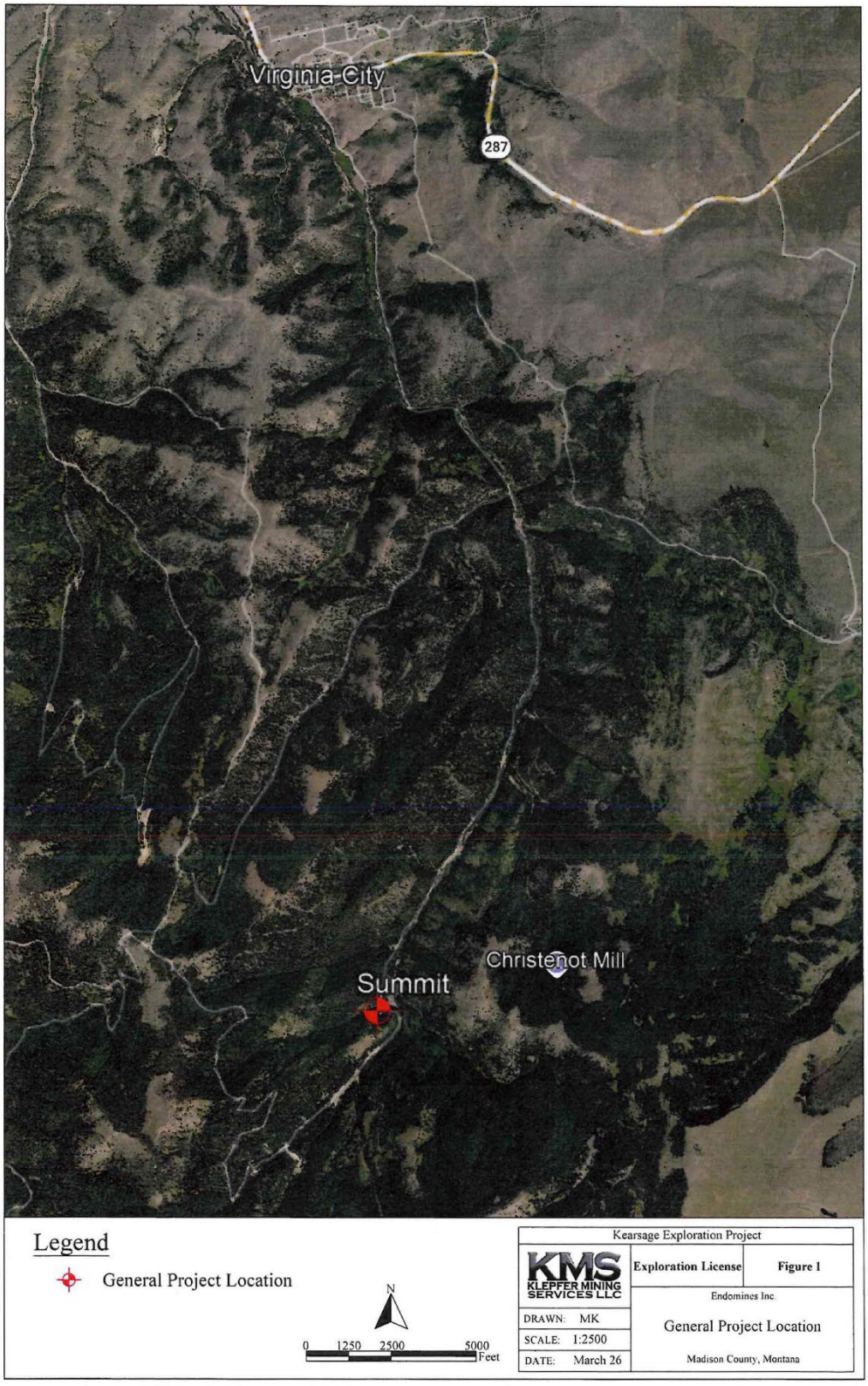
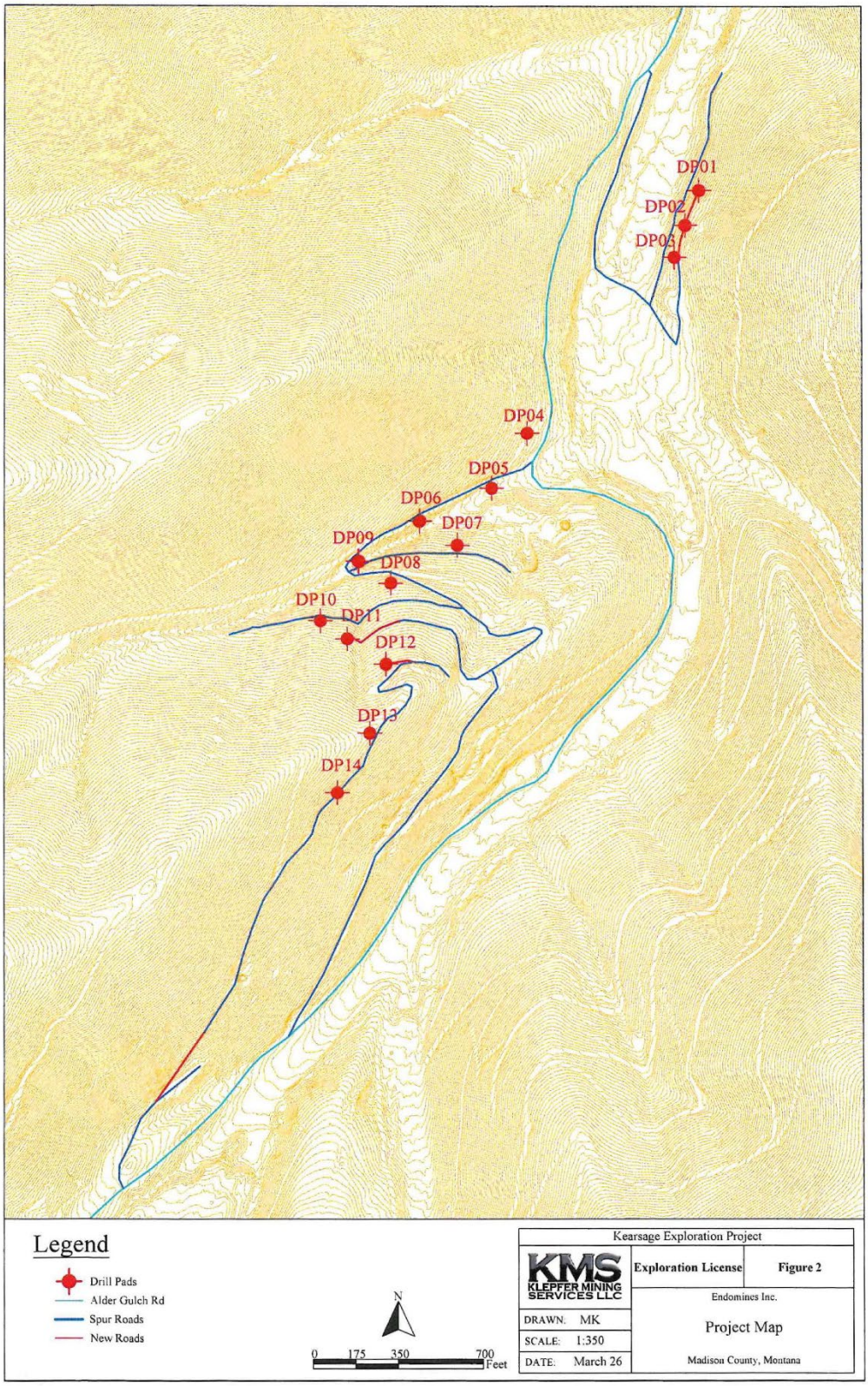


Figure 2: Map of Proposed Exploration Activities



SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS

The impact analysis will identify and estimate whether the impacts are direct or secondary impacts. Direct impacts occur at the same time and place as the action that causes the impact. Secondary impacts are a further impact to the human environment that may be stimulated, or induced by, or otherwise result from a direct impact of the action (ARM 17.4.603(18)). Where impacts would occur, the impacts will be described.

Cumulative impacts are the collective impacts on the human environment within the borders of Montana of the Proposed Action when considered in conjunction with other past and present actions related to the Proposed Action by location and generic type. Related future actions must also be considered when these actions are under concurrent consideration by any state agency through pre-impact statement studies, separate impact statement evaluation, or permit processing procedures. The proposed actions identified in **Table 1** were analyzed as part of the cumulative impacts assessment for each resource.

1. Geology and Soil Quality, Stability, and Moisture

The proposed exploration area would be located on private lands approximately 6 miles south of Virginia City, in Madison County, Montana.

Virginia City Mining District

The Summit subdistrict occupies the head of Alder Gulch within the Virginia City Mining District in the southern Tobacco Root Mountains. Regional bedrock consists primarily of ancient gneiss and schist intruded by quartz monzonite during the Late Cretaceous or early Tertiary. Gold mineralization in the broader district occurs in fissure-filling veins that cut across the bedding planes of the metamorphic rocks and generally dip northward (Tansley et al., 1933).

Summit ores are characterized by pyrite and coarse native or telluride gold, with relatively little silver or base metals (Winchell, 1914). Early mines exploited shallow, oxidized, free-milling ores from which gold could be readily recovered. These deposits were largely depleted by the mid-1870s; mineralized veins continued at depth, but the deeper ores were more complex and difficult to process using contemporary equipment (Tansley et al., 1933).

Notable Summit mines included the Kearsarge, Oro Cache, Lucas, and General Shafter. The Kearsarge produced free-milling gold during the 1860s and underwent substantial redevelopment beginning in 1901. These operations illustrate the subdistrict's transition from shallow, readily processed gold deposits to deeper lode development. The historical account does not provide detailed vein geometry or site-specific subsurface conditions for the proposed exploration area. (Tansley et al., 1933).

Soil Types

The mapped area of interest encompasses approximately 2,593.5 acres. Of this area, 1,409.7 acres (54.4 percent) have a slight erosion hazard rating for off-road or off-trail disturbances. These map units include Shadow complex, warm, 15 to 45 percent slopes (64.9 acres); Shadow complex, warm, 45 to 70 percent slopes (905.5 acres); Dailybasin-Cuberant, very stony families,

complex, 8 to 60 percent slopes (174.2 acres); Rochester-Rock outcrop complex, 35 to 70 percent slopes (240.4 acres); Sebud-Hapgood complex, 8 to 45 percent slopes (4.1 acres); and Cumulic Haplustolls-Aquic Cumulic Haplustolls, rarely ponded-Chaffee, frequently ponded, families, complex, 0 to 5 percent slopes (20.5 acres). Soils with a slight erosion hazard rating indicate that erosion is unlikely under ordinary climatic conditions.

Approximately 1,030.6 acres (39.7 percent) have a moderate erosion hazard rating. These map units include Sebud-Hapgood-Rock outcrop complex, 25 to 60 percent slopes (389.7 acres); Whitore complex, 15 to 45 percent slopes (235.1 acres); Whitore-Rock outcrop complex, 25 to 70 percent slopes (297.5 acres); Whitore family-Rock outcrop-Tropal family, complex, valley trough walls (101.8 acres); and Bearmouth-Sebud-Shadow families, complex, steep mountain slopes (6.4 acres). Soil with a moderate erosion hazard rating indicates that some erosion is likely and that erosion-control measures may be needed (Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2026).

The remaining 153.1 acres (5.9 percent) are classified as null or not rated for this erosion-hazard interpretation. These areas include Rock outcrop and Rubble land (33.7 acres) and Arrowpeak, rubbly-Boatman, very stony families-Rubble land, complex, 50 to 80 percent slopes (119.4 acres). No unusual or unstable geologic features are present, and no fragile or distinctly erosive, unstable soils are present.

The analysis area for geology and soils in the project area and immediately surrounding landscape in Madison County, Montana (Table 1). The Applicant must comply with the applicable local, county, state, and federal requirements for erosion control and sediment transport.

The Applicant proposes to minimize surface disturbance by using existing private roads where practicable, field-fitting drill pads to provide the smallest safe working area, and using existing road prisms and established parking areas for laydown and staging. Drill sumps would be constructed within the drill-pad footprints. Pads would be constructed in stages and reclaimed concurrently as drilling is completed, and new temporary roads would be fully reclaimed upon completion of their use. Proposed erosion-control BMPs include vegetated buffers, earthen berms, silt fencing and spill prevention and response kits. Disturbed areas beyond existing road prisms would be regraded and seeded, and new-road cut and fill slopes would be seeded during the first appropriate season following construction.

Direct Impacts:

The proposed action would result in localized soil disturbance associated with construction of 14 drill pads, each providing approximately 50 feet by 30 feet of working space, and 14 internal drill sumps, each approximately 15 feet long by 6 feet wide by 8 feet deep. Access would involve brushing and grading approximately 10,632 feet of existing private roads, approximately 10 feet wide, and constructing approximately 865 feet of new temporary roads with an average disturbance width of approximately 35 feet. The plan estimates surface disturbance of approximately 3.12 acres.

The drilling program would include up to 16 core holes, with individual hole depths not exceeding 1,400 feet and combined drilled footage of up to 14,900 feet. Drilling would remove

an unknown quantity of subsurface material for evaluation. Each drill sump would involve approximately 27 cubic yards of excavation. Drill holes would be plugged upon completion, and pads and sumps would be reclaimed as drilling progresses.

Secondary Impacts:

Disturbance associated with drill-pad and sump construction, grading of existing roads, and construction of new temporary roads could increase erosion and sediment transport during stormwater runoff. Surface soil disturbance could allow for the establishment of weeds. Weed control during and after exploration activities is a requirement. Noxious weeds are further addressed in "Section 4. Vegetation Cover, Quantity, and Quality."

Cumulative Impacts:

Cumulative impacts to soil stability from the proposed action, including increased potential for soil erosion and area instability, could impact soil stability from previous historic mining activities in the project area. The additional disturbance of up to 3.12 acres, some on previously disturbed ground, with application of erosion-control BMPs and reclamation, is expected to make only a minor, short-term contribution to the cumulative effects on soil stability and geologic conditions and would not measurably change long-term geologic or soil stability characteristics in the project area vicinity.

2. Water Quality, Quantity, and Distribution

Surface Water and Runoff:

The Kearsage Exploration project area is located within the 17.9 square mile Alder Gulch watershed. Of this total area, 4.22 square miles of the Upper Alder Gulch subwatershed drains to the point on Alder Creek nearest the proposed action. The watershed receives a mean annual precipitation of 25.44 inches (StreamStats, 2026).

The Applicant proposes construction of up to 14 drill pads with 14 internal drill sumps and drilling of up to 16 exploration holes, each with a maximum depth of 1,400 feet. Access would require brushing and grading approximately 10,632 feet of existing roads and constructing approximately 865 feet of new temporary roads. The Applicant proposes a 35-foot disturbance width for new road construction. No overland travel routes are proposed. The surface disturbance would be approximately 3.12 acres.

The proposed action is adjacent to two mapped wetland and riparian system types, totaling 47 acres. Palustrine systems comprise semipermanently flooded aquatic-bed wetlands (2 acres), intermittently exposed aquatic-bed wetlands (3 acres), seasonally flooded unconsolidated-shore wetlands (4 acres), and persistent emergent wetlands (34 acres). The persistent emergent wetlands include temporarily flooded (21 acres), seasonally flooded (12 acres), and semipermanently flooded (1 acre) wetlands. Riparian systems consist of lotic scrub-shrub habitat (4 acres) (MTNHP, 2026). No disturbance of mapped wetland or riparian systems is proposed.

Groundwater

Within the analysis area in the Upper Alder Gulch subwatershed, one domestic water well is present, located in Township 7 South, Range 3 West, Section 14. The John Cagigas well (GWIC #340059) was drilled in 2025 to a total depth of 145 feet. This well had a static water level of 20 feet and a yield test of 15 gallons per minute.

The Applicant proposes drilling to a maximum depth of 1400 feet from the surface. Except for potentially shallow drill holes, it is expected that groundwater would be encountered during drilling operations. However, the hydrologic setting, including the distance between groundwater and the surface and the transmissive, unconfined nature of the aquifer, indicates that artesian flow would not be expected to occur from the drill holes, reducing the potential for uncontrolled groundwater or groundwater-containing drilling fluids to flow to the surface.

The Applicant would collect and remove solid waste on a regular basis and dispose of it at a disposal facility in Virginia City, Montana. Spill kits would be kept with the drill rig and service truck to absorb mechanically spilled petroleum products. Following drilling and reclamation, no equipment or other items from the drilling project would remain on site.

Water Supply:

The proposed activities at the water source include the withdrawal of up to 20,000 gallons of water per day from a developed spring at the Applicant's US Grant Site, located in Section 26, Township 6 South, Range 3 West. The developed spring is listed as an active groundwater certificate with the DNRC, with the purpose listed as "mining", with maximum flows of up to 135 gallons per minute. Water would be loaded into a tandem-axle water truck, with a capacity up to 6,000 gallons, and conveyed from the source location to the drilling project area and transferred to portable water-storage bladders at the drill site area. Any water potentially spilled during transfer of fresh water from the private water source to the transport truck would have similar impacts to surface water runoff from a stormwater-producing event, as described above. The withdrawal of up to 20,000 gallons of water per day from the developed spring at the water source location would represent similar demand for the well from other existing public and private uses and the aquifer that it accesses. The Applicant is required to comply with the applicable local, county, state, and federal requirements pertaining to water quality.

Direct Impacts:

Surface Water and Runoff:

Precipitation and surface water would generally be expected to infiltrate into the shallow subsurface and be retained within pore spaces in the unsaturated soil or vadose zone and potentially utilized by vegetation. Infiltrating runoff is not expected to reach the groundwater table in sufficient quantity to impact the aquifer or influence water quality beyond baseline conditions.

However, stormwater leaving the sites during heavy storms could carry sediment from the disturbed soils and non-sediment contaminants from drilling operations. To comply with ARM 17.24.105, the Applicant must confine drilling fluids as well as waste cuttings from drilling

operations to the drill site by the use of storage tanks or sumps or dispose of the fluids or waste in accordance with an approved plan. In the event that an inadvertent release of drilling fluid to the surface took place, it would be a violation of ARM 17.24.105 and a violation would be issued to the Applicant, following the regular compliance structure. Practically, the drilling fluids would be handled similarly to a fuel or water release. The drilling fluids would likely act as a thin mud or paste with increased viscosity (i.e., decreased fluidity), and would likely be contained within the drill pad area by the stormwater and sediment controls described in the Surface Water and Runoff section above. The Applicant also proposes the use of erosion control BMPs to minimize sediment transport off-site and maintain surface water quality, including vegetated buffers, earthen berms, and silt fencing.

Groundwater:

The drilling and plugging processes are not expected to affect the groundwater quantity or quality or disturb other water users in the greater project area. The Applicant proposes drilling to a maximum depth of 1,400 feet from the surface. Except for potentially shallow drillholes, it is expected that groundwater would be encountered during drilling operations. However, the hydrologic setting (i.e., the distance between groundwater and the surface, in a transmissive unconfined aquifer) indicates that artesian flow would not be expected to occur from the drillholes, eliminating the potential impacts from uncontrolled flow of groundwater and groundwater-containing drilling fluids coming back up to the surface.

All exploration drill holes would be reclaimed in accordance with ARM 17.24.106. Unless DEQ grants an exception, the rule requires a cement plug in the upper five to ten feet of each hole and, where the groundwater conditions specified in ARM 17.24.106(2) apply, bentonite or a similar compound from the bottom of the hole to the cement plug. The proposed surface drilling activity, and the resulting drill holes prior to plugging, are unlikely to influence the elevation or the quality of groundwater.

Water Supply Impacts:

The proposed activities at the water source include the withdrawl of up to 20,000 gallons of water per day, and pumping water into a water truc. In the even of an uncontrolled transfer of water or water spillarge, the action proposed could have similar impacts to surface water runoff from a stormwater producing event, as described above. The transfer of water would be controlled by piping and valving at the water source. The withdrawal of us to 20,000 gallons of water per day from the water sources would likely represent similar demand from previous projects that the water supply has been used for (Endomines's US Grant Small Miner Exclusion Statement No. 25-237). The proposed withdrawl from the developed springs is unlikely to measurably affect aquifer storage or the distribution of water among existing suers downstream of the area.

The Applicant is required to comply with the applicable local, county, state and federal requirements pertaining to water quality.

Secondary Impacts:

Stormwater impacting the sites during a precipitation event would generally be expected to infiltrate into the subsurface; however, stormwater leaving the sites could carry sediment from the disturbed soils and non-sediment contaminants from drilling operations. The Applicant proposes the use of vegetated buffers, earthen berms, silt fencing, and spill prevention response kits as BMPs to minimize erosion and transport of sediment and non-sediment contaminants off-site.

Cumulative Impacts:

Cumulatively, the proposed exploration drilling would add a limited, temporary disturbance to an area already used for exploration and historical mining. Activities include 16 drill holes on 14 pads, drill sumps, and approximately 865 feet of new temporary roads, totaling an estimated 3.12 acres of disturbance. Runoff could incrementally contribute to existing sediment concerns in Alder Gulch Creek. Concurrent reclamation, regrading and seeding, spill-response measures, petroleum containment, and drill-hole plugging would reduce potential sediment delivery, contaminant releases, and groundwater cross-contamination. Estimated water demand of approximately 20,000 gallons per day for drilling operations, sample recovery, and dust control would add to existing uses at the US Grant Project spring source. With effective implementation of the proposed controls, incremental water-quality impacts would be expected to be limited. Because the proposed action would utilize the above-referenced plan design elements and associated BMPs, the cumulative impacts on surface water and groundwater quality are expected to be minor and not significant.

3. Air Quality

The Yellowstone National Park is the closest Class 1 Airshed to the project area, approximately 40 miles southeast. The immediate area complies with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

The Applicant proposes to minimize impacts to air quality by applying water to roads. The Applicant is required to obtain any other necessary permits related to air quality as required by state, local, and federal law.

Direct Impacts:

Dust particulates would be produced or become airborne during exploration and reclamation operations. Mechanized equipment would produce some exhaust fumes. Dust would also be produced while traveling along existing roads to and from the project area. The operator would be expected to maintain compliance with Montana's law regarding the need to take reasonable precautions to control airborne particulate matter.

Although the proposed action could result in fugitive dust and equipment exhaust, it would not be expected to impact the Yellowstone National Park Class 1 Airshed due to the small scale of

activity and distance between the proposed action and the airshed, in conjunction with implementation of BMPs.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts to air quality would be expected from the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts on air quality would be expected from the proposed action. Cumulative impacts to air quality from the proposed action could add to impacts from existing traffic in the greater project area in the use of public and private roads in the vicinity of the proposed action.

4. Vegetation Cover, Quantity, and Quality

Approximately 7,038 acres surrounding the greater project area were mapped using the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP, 2026). The land cover primarily consists of forest and woodland and shrubland, with smaller areas of grassland, sparse and barren land, human land use, wetlands and riparian areas, and open water systems.

- Forest and woodland: Approximately 4,921.5 acres (69.9%), comprising Rocky Mountain Douglas-fir forest (2,211.3 acres; 31.4%); lodgepole pine forest (1,635.9 acres; 23.2%); dry spruce-fir forest (941.7 acres; 13.4%); whitebark pine–subalpine larch forest and woodland (54.6 acres; 0.8%); mesic spruce-fir forest (36.9 acres; 0.5%); montane–subalpine limber pine woodland (25.3 acres; 0.4%); foothills limber pine–juniper woodland (10.6 acres; 0.2%); and Rocky Mountain aspen forest and woodland (5.2 acres; 0.1%).

- Shrubland: Approximately 1,215.2 acres (17.3%), comprising mountain big sagebrush shrubland (1,205.0 acres; 17.1%); lowland–montane shrubland (9.3 acres; 0.1%); and montane–subalpine mesic shrubland (0.9 acres; <0.1%).

- Grassland: Approximately 443.1 acres (6.3%), comprising montane–subalpine dry grassland (298.8 acres; 4.2%); montane–subalpine mesic grassland and meadow (138.2 acres; 2.0%); and Rocky Mountain low-elevation dry grassland (6.1 acres; 0.1%).

- Sparse and barren: Approximately 226.6 acres (3.2%), consisting entirely of Rocky Mountain cliff, scree, and rock outcrops.

- Human land use: Approximately 211.4 acres (3.0%), comprising other roads (206.3 acres; 2.9%); developed vegetation (4.7 acres; 0.1%); and low- and medium-intensity development (0.4 acres; <0.1%).

- Wetland and riparian: Approximately 20.3 acres (0.3%), comprising montane–subalpine riparian and seep shrubland (8.0 acres; 0.1%); montane wet meadow and marsh (7.9 acres; 0.1%); montane–subalpine riparian forest (2.8 acres; <0.1%); and lowland–montane riparian shrubland (1.6 acres; <0.1%).

- Open water: Approximately 0.2 acres (<0.1%), consisting entirely of open water classified in the 2025 land-cover dataset.

A review of the MTNHP species occurrence and potential occurrence data for the project identified 31 vascular plant Species of Concern (SOC) and 6 Species of Potential Concern (SOPC). These include one documented SOC occurrence, whitebark pine (Pinus albicaulis), and 30 SOC and 6 SOPC listed as other potential species. Of these vascular plants, 7 SOC and 1 SOPC are designated as USFS Species of Conservation Concern (SCC). The BLM identifies 5 vascular plant SOCs as sensitive and 1 as threatened.

The Applicant would complete concurrent reclamation of drill pads as drilling is completed. Disturbed areas extending beyond the existing road prism would be regraded and seeded, and new temporary access roads would be fully reclaimed upon completion of their use. Following final grading, areas would be broadcast seeded using a seed mixture acceptable to the landowner. Road cut and fill slopes would be seeded during the first appropriate season following construction.

The Applicant has also committed to the following weed control measures, including: cleaning and washing all tracked or wheeled equipment off-site before mobilization to the project area to minimize the introduction and spread of weeds through dirt and debris from other locations. Reviewing each reclaimed site annually for three years and treating weeds on disturbed areas as needed.

Direct Impacts:

The vegetation cover as described above would be removed or disturbed on vegetated ground within the 3.12 acres of surface disturbance proposed. Exploration activities that could affect the vegetation cover, quantity, and quality include the grubbing, scraping, trampling, and removal of vegetative cover not already affected by previous actions to develop drill pads, drill sumps, improvements to existing roads, new roads, and other proposed action disturbances related to exploration activities. Due to the limited disturbance area, the exploration activities are unlikely to cause broad, long-term loss of native vegetation or habitat and the population or ecosystem scale in the greater project area.

Secondary Impacts:

Equipment movement and surface disturbance could introduce or spread noxious weeds, potentially affecting vegetation composition and delaying revegetation. To minimize seed transmission, the Applicant would wash tracked and wheeled equipment off-site before bringing it to the project area, removing soil and debris that could contain weed seeds. The Applicant would inspect each reclaimed site annually for three years and treat weeds on disturbed areas as needed. Reclamation would include regrading and seeding disturbed areas outside the existing road prism with a seed mixture acceptable to the landowner. Road cut-and-fill slopes would be seeded during the first appropriate season following construction. These measures would reduce the potential for weed establishment and support recovery of vegetation cover. The project area would be subject to the 2017 Montana Noxious Weed Management Plan and any

additional measures required by the Madison County Weed Control Board. Weed control is a condition of an exploration license, and the Applicant would be required to minimize the spread of noxious weeds.

Cumulative Impacts:

Cumulative impacts on vegetation cover, quantity, and quality from the proposed action could add to existing impacts from exploration and historical mining operations within the project area. Reclaimed areas are expected to re-establish cover comparable to surrounding undisturbed lands.

5. Terrestrial, Avian, and Aquatic Life and Habitats

The proposed exploration drilling area is outside mapped greater sage-grouse Core, General, and Connectivity Habitat. However, the proposed water source at the US Grant site is located within mapped greater sage-grouse General Habitat. Accordingly, the habitat analysis distinguishes disturbance associated with drilling and road construction from water collection and associated vehicle activity at the US Grant site. Sage-grouse-specific considerations are discussed further in "Section 6. Unique, Endangered, Fragile, or Limited Environmental Resources."

The proposed action is expected to temporarily affect approximately 3.12 acres of terrestrial, avian, and aquatic habitat, potentially displacing wildlife within the exploration drilling area. Portions of the disturbance would occur on lands previously altered by historic exploration and mining activities. Wildlife species commonly occurring in the area, including birds such as the state-protected greater sage grouse, as well as mammals, amphibians, and invertebrates, may be temporarily displaced during equipment operation, vehicle use, and other project activities. Noise, human presence, and ground disturbance may also cause wildlife utilizing adjacent habitats to temporarily avoid the project vicinity. Displaced wildlife is expected to find other suitable habitats in the surrounding undeveloped area and return to the project area following completion of exploration and reclamation activities.

Direct Impacts:

Impacts on terrestrial, avian, and aquatic life and habitats may include increased ambient noise levels from the drilling equipment and temporary displacement in the project area. Although drilling and associated construction would occur outside mapped sage-grouse habitat, water collection at the US Grant site would introduce project-related truck traffic, noise, and human activity within General Habitat. These activities could temporarily disturb sage-grouse if present near the filling location or access route. Impacts to noise levels are further discussed in "Section 8. Aesthetics."

Wildlife could experience increased orientation or disorientation from additional illumination and be attracted to or repulsed by the increased light glare. This increased light could affect foraging, reproduction, communication, and other behaviors (Longcore and Rich, 2024). Any impact that could occur to terrestrial, avian, and aquatic life due to lighting impacts would last for the duration of low light activities under the proposed action.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts to terrestrial, avian, and aquatic life and habitats stimulated or induced by the direct impacts analyzed above would be expected. The water-protection, erosion-control, and spill-prevention and response measures are designed to minimize any water-quality or habitat changes that could trigger secondary biological responses in downstream systems. The project does not authorize activities such as long-term flow alteration, persistent sediment loading, or toxic releases that would secondarily degrade aquatic habitat or stimulate population-level effects on sensitive species.

Cumulative Impacts:

Cumulative impacts to terrestrial, avian, and aquatic life and habitats from the proposed action could add to existing impacts from exploration and historical mining operations in the area.

6. Unique, Endangered, Fragile, or Limited Environmental Resources

A search of MTNHP in the exploration drilling area identified bird, invertebrate, fish, amphibian, vascular plant and mammal habitats and potential habitats for 63 SOC and 18 SOPC. The USFS identified 30 species as sensitive, and 13 as Species of Conservation Concern (SCC). The BLM identified 20 species as Sensitive, including westslope cutthroat trout *(Oncorhynchus lewisi),* for which occurrence is documented in the analysis area. Four species were identified by the BLM as Threatened, including grizzly bear *(Ursus arctos)*, wolverine *(Gulo gulo)*, whitebark pine *(Pinus albicaulis)*, which have documented occurrences, and Canada lynx *(Lynx canadensis)*, which is identified as potentially occurring.

Habitat for these species in the exploration drilling area is common and not unique to the project area. Habitat for all other species within the project area is common throughout the larger ecosystem, and any displaced animal could find other suitable habitats in the surrounding undeveloped area and return to the project area after the proposed action's conclusion.

The proposed project water source is located within General Habitat for sage grouse. The BLM classifies this area as a General Habitat Management Area. As no material disturbance is proposed at the project water source, no consultation documentation has been provided to DEQ, and DEQ is unaware of any formal consultation by the Applicant with the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program.

Direct Impacts:

The proposed action would result in the disturbance of up to 3.12 acres at the exploration drilling area. No surface disturbances are proposed at the project water source. Impacts to other unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources could include increased ambient noise levels from drilling operations and temporary displacement in the project area. No removal of mapped sage grouse habitat is proposed at the exploration drilling area. At the US Grant water source, potential direct effects would primarily involve temporary disturbance from truck movements, filling operations, noise, and human presence within General Habitat. The

magnitude of these effects would depend on sage grouse use of the surrounding area, proximity to breeding or seasonal-use areas, and the timing, frequency, and duration of water collection. Impacts to noise levels are further discussed in “Section 8. Aesthetics.” The proposed action does not propose to disturb wetlands or riparian habitat.

Secondary Impacts:

Potential secondary effects could include changes in habitat use if repeated water source activity causes avoidance of otherwise suitable areas. No secondary impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources that could be stimulated or induced by the direct impacts analyzed above would be expected at the drill sites.

Cumulative Impacts:

Cumulative impacts on other unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources from the proposed action could add to existing impacts from previous exploration or historic mining operations in the project area's immediate vicinity. Water collection and hauling for the proposed exploration could add traffic, noise, and human activity to existing operations at the US Grant site and along shared access routes within General Habitat.

7. Historical and Archaeological Sites

The Montana Cultural Resource Database under the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) indicates that there are historical sites and inventoried areas present within the project area. The proposed exploration activities are located on private lands using existing mining and exploration roads, with additional disturbance associated with drill pads, sumps and temporary road construction. The Applicant states that activities on existing roads or adjacent to existing project activities reduce the potential to encounter cultural or historical resources.

If historical or archaeological resources are encountered, the Applicant would stop work and contract the landowner to determine the appropriate course of action. The Applicant is required to comply with the applicable local, county, state, and federal requirements pertaining to cultural resources.

Direct Impacts:

Unidentified cultural or historic resources could be disturbed by exploration activities. No direct impacts on historical or archaeological sites would be expected from the proposed action.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts on historical or archaeological sites would be expected from the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts on historical and archaeological resources would be expected from the proposed action.

8. Aesthetics

The proposed activities would occur on private lands accessed by existing private roads and Alder Gulch Road, a county road. Equipment and disturbed areas could be visible to travelers on nearby public roads and from locations where topography or vegetation does not obscure the project. Road and drill pad construction would temporarily alter localized ground contours and views. The Applicant proposes concurrent reclamation, removal of equipment, restoration of existing road surfaces, and regrading and seeding of disturbed areas outside the road prism to reduce permanent changes to the topography or the viewshed. Noise associated with the proposed action may be heard where sound related to the proposed action has not been fully diminished by distance or another sound-dampening feature. All equipment on site would utilize factory mufflers to reduce noise associated with operations.

The proposed action includes nighttime operations, with drilling conducted in two 12-hour shifts per day, up to seven days per week. A portable diesel-powered light plant would illuminate the drill site area. The Applicant has proposed the use of downward-facing lights as a BMP to reduce illumination of areas outside of the drill sites.

Direct Impacts:

The proposed action would be temporarily visible to or heard by the sparsely populated surrounding area and to receptors located at observation points that are unobstructed by topography or forested vegetation. The sites would be visible from portions of county roads in the vicinity of the drill sites and other disturbances during drilling and reclamation operations. Downward-directed lighting would limit, but not eliminate, light spill and visibility of the illuminated work area. Noise from drilling, construction, the light plant, and vehicle traffic could be audible beyond the disturbance footprint, including at night, depending on distance, terrain, vegetation, and operating conditions. Aesthetic impacts from exploration and reclamation activities would include views of heavy equipment like the drill rig, passenger vehicles, and miscellaneous equipment related to drilling and reclamation. Noise associated with the proposed action could be heard where sound related to the proposed action has not been fully diminished by distance or another sound-dampening feature. Sources of noise could include the operation of heavy equipment, construction activities, and travel. Final reclamation would be required within 2 years of completion of the proposed action.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts to area aesthetics would be expected from the proposed work.

Cumulative Impacts:

Cumulatively, the proposed action would add a short-term increment of visible equipment, construction activity and noise in the project area, within a landscape affected by travel and previous exploration and historical mining activities. These visual and noise effects are expected to be minor and temporary, with final reclamation required within 2 years after exploration concludes.

9. Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, Air, or Energy

Proposed action water would be supplied from a developed spring near the Applicant's US Grant site, located in Section 26, Township 6 South, Range 3 West. The developed spring is listed as an active groundwater certificate with the DNRC, with the purpose listed as "mining", with maximum flows of up to 135 gallons per minute.

Proof of water right ownership is not a requirement under MMRA for obtaining an exploration license. However, an exploration license requires that the Applicant conduct exploration activities in compliance with all applicable state and federal laws, including Montana water rights law administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). The Applicant proposes using approximately 20,000 gallons of water per day during drilling operations, transported to the drill site by surface water truck. No other local land, water, air, or energy resources would be used as part of this proposed action.

Direct Impacts:

The proposed action would consume up to 20,000 gallons of water resources per day during drilling activities. No direct impacts on land, air or energy are expected from this proposed action.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts to environmental resources of land, water, air, or energy would be expected.

Cumulative Impacts:

Cumulatively, the proposed action's use of up to 20,000 gallons of water per day from a developed spring would add to existing demands on the water table, which could affect overall water availability or water table capacity in the immediate vicinity. No additional cumulative impacts on the environmental resources of land, air or energy are expected from the proposed action.

10. Impacts on Other Environmental Resources

DEQ searched the following websites or databases for nearby activities that may affect the proposed action; however, no other projects were identified:

- Montana Department of Natural Resource and Conservation (DNRC)

- Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
- Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)
- Madison County
- United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- United States Forest Service (USFS)

Direct Impacts:

No direct impacts on other environmental resources would be expected from the proposed action.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts on other environmental resources would be expected from the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts to other environmental resources would be expected from the proposed action.

11. Human Health and Safety

The Applicant would be required to adhere to all applicable state and federal safety laws. Industrial work such as the work proposed by the Applicant is inherently dangerous. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has developed rules and guidelines to reduce the risks associated with this type of labor. The proposed action would occur on private land, and no members of the public may be in the project area during exploration and reclamation operations.

Direct Impacts:

Direct impacts to human health and safety to the Applicant's exploration staff could occur from this proposed action; however, compliance with OSHA standards would substantially reduce risk. The inhalation of exhaust fumes and the ingestion of dust generated by equipment during exploration operations and reclamation would be minimized with proper personal protective equipment. Increases in operation-related traffic would likely occur. The daily traffic that would be leaving the site could vary greatly.

Secondary Impacts:

Fugitive dust that leaves the project area and is not dispersed by air movement could be deposited near the project area, which could cause irritation with varying degrees of severity to receptors who come into contact with that dust. ARM 17.8.308 would require the Applicant to take reasonable precautions to control airborne particulate matter.

Dust impacts from the proposed action would be minimized by implementing wet drilling and applying water to travel/working surfaces.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts on human health and safety would be expected from the proposed action.

12. Industrial, Commercial, and Agricultural Activities and Production

No other industrial, commercial, or agricultural activities are known to occur in the project area.

Direct Impacts:

No direct impacts to industrial, commercial or agricultural activities and production in the area would be expected from the proposed action.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts to industrial, commercial, or agricultural activities and production in the area would be expected from the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts on the industrial, commercial, and agricultural activities and production in the area would be expected from the proposed action.

13. Quantity and Distribution of Employment

Existing employees of a drilling subcontractor would likely be utilized for this proposed project. The Applicant proposes that 2 Lead Drillers, 2 Assistant Drillers, 2 Driller Helpers, 1 Equipment Operator, 3 Geologists, and 1 Corporate Project Oversight would be onsite during operations. It is not anticipated that this proposed action would create, move, or eliminate jobs. It is not anticipated that this proposed action would create, move, or eliminate jobs.

Direct Impacts:

Direct impacts on quantity and distribution of employment would not likely result from this proposed action. The proposed action plan calls for several limited-duration contracted and otherwise employed people at the site. No lasting positive or negative impacts to employment would be expected from this proposed action.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts to quantity and distribution of employment would be expected from the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts on the quantity and distribution of employment would be expected from the proposed action.

14. Local and State Tax Base and Tax Revenues

The proposed action would have a limited increase in tax revenue related to payroll taxes from the proposed action.

Direct Impacts:

Some positive, yet limited, benefit to the local and state economy could result from this proposed action. However, due to the nature of the action, minimal tax revenue from income, the purchase of local goods and services, or expenses would be expected from this proposed action. The significance assessment is presented in Table 2.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts to the local and state tax base and tax revenues would be expected from the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts to the local and state tax base and tax revenue would be expected from the proposed action.

15. Demand for Government Services

It is not anticipated that substantial traffic or services would be necessary as part of this proposed action. The proposed action would be located on private lands using private, county, and public access roads. Site access would rely on existing roads and private access roads to drill pad locations. Water would be sourced from the US Grant site and transported to the drill area using Alder Gulch Road. All operations would be subject to local, seasonal restrictions as they apply.

Direct Impacts:

No direct impacts to the demand for government services would be expected from the proposed action. Impacts would not be expected on the demand for government services.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts to the demand for government services would be expected from the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts on demand for government services would be expected from the proposed action.

16. Locally Adopted Environmental Plans and Goals

The proposed activities would occur on private lands within the Ruby River watershed. Relevant watershed planning documents include the 2015 *Ruby Watershed Restoration Plan*, DEQ's 2006 *Ruby River Watershed Total Maximum Daily Loads and Framework for a Water Quality Restoration Plan*, and DEQ's 2020 *Ruby River Watershed TMDL Implementation Evaluation*. These documents establish or evaluate goals for reducing pollutant loading and improving water quality, riparian condition, and stream function. Recommendations for Alder Gulch Creek include reducing road-related sediment delivery, protecting and restoring riparian vegetation, improving grazing management, and rehabilitating channels affected by historical mining (RWC, 2015, Sections 2–3; DEQ, 2006, Table 10-4; DEQ, 2020). The project area would be subject to any plans or rules set forth by Madison County and the 2017 Montana Noxious Weed Management Plan.

Direct Impacts:

The proposed action would not amend these watershed planning documents or their restoration goals. The Applicant's proposed vegetated buffers, earthen berms, concurrent reclamation, regrading, and seeding are generally consistent with their erosion-control and water-quality protection objectives. Equipment cleaning and post-reclamation weed monitoring would also support vegetation recovery.

Provided that existing restoration features and BMPs are avoided and the proposed controls effectively limit sediment delivery, the proposed action would not be expected to interfere with watershed restoration efforts.

Secondary Impacts:

No additional secondary conflicts with watershed planning goals have been identified. Erosion, weed establishment, or unsuccessful revegetation could undermine those goals if protection and reclamation measures are ineffective. The proposed controls and follow-up weed management are intended to reduce these risks.

Cumulative Impacts:

The proposed disturbance could incrementally add to existing sediment sources within the Alder Gulch drainage. Effective erosion control, protection of existing restoration features, and successful reclamation would limit the potential to impede watershed restoration progress. Because the proposed action would utilize the above-referenced plan design elements and associated BMPs, the cumulative impacts on locally adopted environmental plans and goals are expected to be minor and not significant.

17. Access to and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities

The proposed exploration activities would occur on private lands. There are recreational opportunities for the general public near the project area, although there are no maintained formal access points to recreational opportunities on lands within or adjacent to the project area.

Direct Impacts:

The proposed action would occur on private lands. No impacts to the access of recreational activities are expected. A commonly desired quality of public lands used by recreationists is the isolation and distance from human activity. The quality of recreational activities within the immediately surrounding lands could be impacted similarly in scale, quality, and duration as the impacts described in Section 8. “Aesthetics”.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts to the access and quality of recreational opportunities would be expected from the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts to the access or quality of recreational opportunities would be expected from the proposed action.

18. Density and Distribution of Population and Housing

Madison County had a population of approximately 8,622 people as of the census conducted by the United States Census Bureau in 2020.

Direct Impacts:

Due to the short-term project duration and the temporary nature of the activity, no impact on population density and housing would be expected from this proposed action.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts to population density and housing would be expected from the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts to population density and housing would be expected from the proposed action.

19. Social Structures and Mores

It is not anticipated that this proposed action would disrupt native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Direct Impacts:

No direct impacts on social structures and mores would be expected from the proposed action.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts on social structures and mores would be expected from the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts to social structures and mores would be expected from the proposed action.

20. Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity

It is not anticipated that this proposed action would cause a shift in some unique quality of the area.

Direct Impacts:

No direct impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity would be expected from the proposed action.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity would be expected from the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts to cultural uniqueness and diversity would be expected from the proposed action.

21. Private Property Impacts

The proposed action would take place on private lands. DEQ's approval of AMD1 to Exploration License No. 00907, with conditions, would not affect the Applicant's real property. DEQ has determined, however, that the permit conditions are reasonably necessary to ensure compliance with applicable requirements under the Metal Mine Reclamation Act and demonstrate compliance with those requirements or have been agreed to by the Applicant. Further, if the

application is complete, DEQ must take action on the permit pursuant to ARM 17.24.119. DEQ, therefore, does not have discretion to take alternative action that would have less impact on private property. Therefore, DEQ's approval of an amendment to License No. 00907 would not have private property-taking or damaging implications.

Montana's Private Property Assessment Act, Section 2-10-101, et seq., MCA establishes an orderly and consistent internal management process for state agencies to evaluate their proposed actions under the "Takings Clauses" of the United States and Montana Constitutions, as those clauses are interpreted and applied by the United States and Montana Supreme Courts.

Section 2-10-104, MCA required Montana's Attorney General to develop guidelines, including a checklist, to assist state agencies in identifying and evaluating proposed agency actions that may result in the taking or damaging of private property. In turn, Section 2-10-105(1) and (2), MCA set out a process for each State Agency to evaluate whether a State action may result in an unconstitutional taking of private property. Those provisions direct that:

A. Each state agency shall assign a qualified person or persons in the state agency the duty and authority to ensure that the state agency complies with this part. Each state agency action with taking or damaging implications must be submitted to that person or persons for review and completion of an impact assessment. The state agency may not take the action unless the review and impact assessment have been completed, except that the action with taking or damaging implications may be taken before the review and impact assessment are completed if necessary to avoid an immediate threat to public health or safety.
B. Using the attorney general's guidelines and checklist, the person shall prepare a taking or damaging impact assessment for each state agency action with taking or damaging implications that includes an analysis of at least the following:

    i. the likelihood that a state or federal court would hold that the action is a taking or damaging;

    ii. alternatives to the action that would fulfill the agency's statutory obligations and at the same time reduce the risk for a taking or damaging; and

    iii. the estimated cost of any financial compensation by the state agency to one or more persons that might be caused by the action and the source for payment of the compensation.

DEQ has utilized the Montana Attorney General's Checklist and analytical Flowchart revised in January 2011 to evaluate the legal impact to property rights resulting from the proposed action. These flowchart questions have been applied by DEQ to the proposed project area, which takes place on private land owned by the Applicant, as follows:

- Does the action pertain to land or water management or environmental regulation affecting private real property or water rights? Answer: Yes.
- Does the action result in either a permanent or indefinite physical occupation of private property? Answer: No.

- Does the action deprive the owner of all economically beneficial use of the property? Answer: No.
- Does the action require a property owner to dedicate a portion of property or to grant an easement? Answer: No.
- Does the action deny a fundamental attribute of ownership? Answer: No.
- Does the action have a severe impact on the value of the property? Answer: No.
- Does the action damage the property by causing some physical disturbance with respect to the property in excess of that sustained by the public generally? Answer: No.

Given the results from the legal flowchart questions, DEQ has determined that the permit conditions are reasonably necessary to ensure and demonstrate compliance with applicable requirements of the Metal Mine Reclamation Act, Section 82-4-301, et seq., MCA, and have been sought by the Applicant. Therefore, no taking or damaging of private property rights will occur because of DEQ's approval of the Permit Application.

22. Other Appropriate Social and Economic Circumstances

Due to the nature of the proposed exploration activities and the limited project duration, no further direct or secondary impacts would be anticipated from this proposed action.

23. Greenhouse Gas Analysis

When greenhouse gases (GHGs) are emitted by any source, they become well-mixed globally due to their long lifetimes in the atmosphere (i.e., tens of years for methane to thousands of years for carbon dioxide) and atmospheric mixing, primarily driven by differential heating and synoptic-scale weather patterns, which distribute the gases throughout the planet, leading to a relatively uniform concentration of these gases across the globe. In general, GHG emissions from sources that are not considered a fossil-fuel activity, as defined by § 75-1-220, MCA, contribute to an overall negligible increase of GHG concentrations in the global atmosphere, not local airsheds, causing a marginal global greenhouse effect (i.e., solar energy trapped in the earth's atmosphere from GHGs, resulting in higher average surface temperatures). Localized industrial source GHG emissions do not have direct impacts on climate, public health and associated impacts to the environment on a local or statewide scale.

DEQ is required to evaluate GHG emissions for statutorily defined fossil fuel activities. 2025 Mont. Laws ch. 348, § 1. However, this exploration activity is excluded from the definition of fossil fuel activities and therefore a GHG assessment is not mandatory. *Id.*, § 4(7)(b)(iii). Instead, to determine if a GHG assessment is needed, DEQ applies the normal MEPA standard of whether GHG emission impacts are potentially significant because of a proposed action, in this case exploration activities. ARM 17.4.609(3)(d)-(e).

DEQ concludes that the authorization of exploration activities pursuant to 82-4-332, MCA, would likely have negligible effect on increased GHG entering the atmosphere, and therefore any additional assessment of GHG is not necessary for purposes of this EA.

PROPOSED ACTION ALTERNATIVES

In addition to the proposed action, DEQ also considered the "no action" alternative. The "no action" alternative would deny the approval of the proposed Exploration License No. 00907. The Applicant would lack the authority to explore minerals on private lands. Any potential impacts authorized under Exploration License No. 00907 would not occur. However, DEQ does not consider the “no action” alternative appropriate because the Applicant has demonstrated compliance with all applicable rules and regulations as required for approval. The no-action alternative forms the baseline from which the proposed action's impacts can be measured.

CONSULTATION

DEQ engaged in internal and external efforts to identify substantive issues and/or concerns related to the proposed action. Internal scoping consisted of an internal review of the environmental assessment document by DEQ staff.

External scoping efforts also included queries to the following websites/databases/personnel:

- Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
- Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
- Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
- Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)
- Madison County
- US Geological Society - Stream Stats (USGS)
- Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP)
- Montana Cadastral Mapping Program
- Montana Groundwater Information Center (GWIC)
- Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology (MBMG)
- United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- United States Forest Service (USFS)

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Under MEPA, an agency is responsible for providing opportunities for public review consistent with the seriousness and complexity of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action and the level of public interest. For purposes of this proposed action, the method of accomplishing public review includes publishing a news release or legal notice to announce the availability of an EA, summarizing its content and soliciting public comment, and distributing copies of the draft EA for review and comment. Any public comment received for this EA will be summarized below.

OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION

The proposed action would be located on private lands. All applicable state and federal rules must be adhered to, which, at some level, may also include other state, federal, or tribal agency jurisdiction.

This environmental review analyzes the proposed action submitted by the Applicant. Any impacts from the action would be short-term and would be fully reclaimed at the conclusion of the proposed action, and thus, would not contribute to the long-term cumulative effects of exploration and historical mining in the area. No other DNRC, BLM, or USFS-regulated projects were identified in the immediate project vicinity.

NEED FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS

When determining whether the preparation of an environmental impact statement is needed, DEQ is required to consider the seven significance criteria set forth in ARM 17.4.608, which are as follows:

1. The severity, duration, geographic extent, and frequency of the occurrence of the impact;
2. The probability that the impact will occur if the proposed action occurs; or conversely, reasonable assurance, in keeping with the potential severity of an impact that the impact will not occur;
3. Growth-inducing or growth-inhibiting aspects of the impact, including the relationship or contribution of the impact to cumulative impacts;
4. The quantity and quality of each environmental resource or value that would be affected, including the uniqueness and fragility of those resources and values;
5. The importance to the state and to society of each environmental resource or value that would be affected;
6. Any precedent that would be set as a result of an impact of the proposed action that would commit the department to future actions with significant impacts or a decision in principle about such future actions; and
7. Potential conflict with local, state, or federal laws, requirements, or formal plans.

The severity, duration, geographic extent, and frequency of the occurrence of the impacts associated with the proposed exploration activities would be limited. The Applicant proposes exploration drilling to evaluate mineralization at the Kearsage Exploration Project. The plan includes 16 drill holes on 14 constructed drill pads, internal drill sumps, use and improvement of existing access roads, and construction of approximately 865 feet of new temporary roads. Total estimated disturbance would be 3.12 acres, with concurrent reclamation of completed drill sites and reclamation of temporary roads following their use.

As described in this EA, the proposed action would authorize surface disturbance and subsurface exploration drilling on private lands in Madison County, Montana. Exploration would use a single drilling rig operating in two 12-hour shifts, up to 24 hours per day, seven days per week. Drill holes would extend to a maximum depth of 1,400 feet. Activities are proposed over a two-year period and would generally be seasonal, although winter work could occur if weather permits. The proposed action is limited to exploration and associated support and reclamation activities; it does not include underground mine workings, mine development for production, ore processing, tailings facilities, or waste-rock facilities. The EA analysis indicates that, with implementation of applicable BMPs and compliance with applicable federal, state, and local requirements, the remaining impacts on Montana's environment of the proposed action would be low to moderate in intensity, localized in extent, and short-term in duration. Applicable BMPs are described throughout the EA in applicable resource sections and Tables 1 and 2.

BMPs to minimize erosion, sediment movement, and water-resource impacts include using existing roads where feasible, maintaining vegetated buffers, installing earthen berms, and reclaiming temporary roads following their use. The Applicant also proposed to utilize spill-response kits and secondary containment for fuel and petroleum products. Drill holes would be plugged upon completion in accordance with ARM 17.24.106, and drill pads would be reclaimed concurrently as drilling progresses. Disturbed areas outside the existing road prism would be regraded and seeded, and road cut-and-fill slopes would be seeded during the first appropriate season following construction. Equipment would be washed off-site before mobilization to reduce weed introduction. The Applicant would inspect each reclaimed site annually for three years and treat weeds on disturbed areas as needed. BMPs to minimize impacts on air quality include applying water to roads for dust control. The Applicant identifies dust control as the largest component of the estimated 20,000-gallon-per-day water demand, with actual use varying according to weather conditions and operational needs.

Further, reclamation of disturbed lands to comparable utility and stability as adjacent undisturbed land would minimize impacts to wildlife and habitats.

Geology, soils, water, and air resources would experience small, temporary increments of additional disturbance and equipment emissions within an area containing existing mining and exploration roads and historical mining disturbance. Reclamation is required within two years after exploration is complete. The proposed action would use an existing water source (up to 20,000 gallons per day) rather than construct new groundwater withdrawals and would plug exploration drill holes in accordance with ARM 17.24.106.

For social and economic resources, the EA concludes that the proposed action would have only limited, short-term positive effects on local employment and tax revenues, would not displace existing industrial, commercial, or agricultural activities, and would be generally consistent with the long-standing mixed mining character of the project area. The limited impacts on employment, tax base, housing, neighborhood character, and demand for government services are not expected to result in substantial growth-inducing or growth-inhibiting effects or conflicts with locally adopted plans, goals, or regulations under ARM 17.4.608. The EA also finds that the proposed action would not result in substantial changes to social structures, cultural uniqueness and diversity, or private property impacts, and would not conflict with local, state, or federal laws, requirements, or formal plans.

Approval of the proposed action does not set any precedent that commits DEQ to future actions with significant impacts or a decision in principle about such future actions. If the Applicant submits additional license, amendment, or operating permit applications to conduct further exploration or mining, DEQ would conduct a separate permitting and environmental review process and make a permitting decision based on the criteria set forth in the MMRA and applicable MEPA requirements. Issuance of this amendment does not predetermine the level of environmental review for any future proposals; that determination would be made on a case-specific basis using the criteria in ARM 17.4.608. Based on consideration of the criteria set forth in ARM 17.4.608, and the analysis presented in this EA, DEQ has determined that the proposed action, AMD1 to Exploration License No. 00907, is not expected to significantly impact the quality of Montana's environment. Preparation of an EA is therefore the appropriate level of environmental review under MEPA, and an EIS is not required for this action.

Table 2: Assessment of Significance (ARM 17.4.608)

Affected Resource and Section Reference	Potential Impact	Severity[1], Extent[2], Duration[3], Frequency[4], Uniqueness and Fragility (U/F)	Probability impact will occur[5]	Cumulative impacts	Measures to reduce impact as proposed by Applicant	Significance (yes/no)
1. Geology and Soil Quality, Stability, and Moisture	A. Displacement/excavation of rock and soil, and drilling. B. Erosion of disturbed soil and weed propagation	**A. Severity-Low:** Of the 3.12 acres of ground that would be disturbed, all disturbance results in the displacement and movement of rock and soil. Drill cuttings and samples would be removed. **Extent-Small:** Total surface area susceptible to displacement would be 3.12 acres. An unknown quantity of samples would be removed for analysis. **Duration- Short Term:** Up to 2 years after completion or abandonment of exploration activities plus growing seasons. **Frequency:** Daily **Unique/Fragile:** Not unique or particularly fragile. **B. Severity-Low:** Of the 3.12 acres of ground that would be disturbed, all disturbance would be susceptible to erosion and propagation of weeds. **Extent-Small:** Total surface disturbance susceptible to erosion and weed propagation would be 3.12 acres. **Duration- Short Term:** Up to 2 years after completion or abandonment of exploration activities plus growing seasons. **Frequency:** During occasional storm events. **Unique/Fragile:** Not unique or particularly fragile.	A. Certain B. Possible	Erosion could add to cumulative impacts associated with potential erosion on existing roads and from previous exploration and historical mining activities within the proposed project area.	The Applicant proposes the use of; • silt fence • straw wattles • Spill prevention/response kits as best management practices (BMPs) to minimize erosion and sediment transport off-site. - Reclamation and seeding would be performed immediately after the conclusion of exploration operations. Weed control is further discussed in “Section 4. Vegetation Cover, Quantity, and Quality”.	No
2. Water Quality, Quantity, and Distribution	Erosion of disturbed soil into waterways, intercepting the groundwater table in the project area, and 20,000 gallons per day withdrawal at the proposed action water source.	**Severity-Low:** Of the 3.12 acres of ground that would be disturbed, all disturbance would be susceptible to erosion. The maximum depth proposed is 1,400 feet from the surface, which would intercept the water table. Up to 20,000 gallons per day would be consumed during drilling operations. **Extent-Small:** Total surface disturbance susceptible to erosion would be 3.12 acres. **Duration- Short Term:** Up to 2 years after completion or abandonment of exploration activities plus growing seasons and during drilling activities. **Frequency:** During occasional storm events and during general drilling operations. **Unique/Fragile:** Not unique or particularly fragile.	Possible	Erosion could add to cumulative impacts associated with potential erosion on existing roads and from previous exploration and historical mining activities within the project area. Proposed water withdrawals at the proposed action water source could add to the cumulative impacts to the aquifer by nearby water users.	The Applicant proposes the use of the above BMPs to minimize erosion and sediment transport off-site. -Drilling could intercept the groundwater table. The Applicant is required to reclaim drill holes in accordance with ARM 17.24.106. - Reclamation and seeding would be performed immediately after the conclusion of exploration operations.	No
3. Air Quality	Erosion of disturbed soil/windblown emissions, e.g., equipment exhaust	**Severity-High:** Dust and other particulates would be generated during exploration operations and while driving on and off-site. Mechanized equipment would produce exhaust fumes. **Extent-Small:** Dust and exhaust fumes would be generated near moving/working equipment. **Duration- Short Term:** Up to 2 years after completion or abandonment of exploration activities plus growing seasons. **Frequency-Daily:** During exploration and reclamation operations. **Unique/Fragile:** Not unique or particularly fragile.	Certain	Dust and exhaust generated from this proposed action would temporarily add to the cumulative impacts from the other vehicles and engines operating in the area and to general recreational activities in the greater project area in the use of public lands near the proposed action.	The Applicant proposes the use of; • application of water to roads as BMPs to minimize the impacts to air quality.	No

Affected Resource and Section Reference	Potential Impact	Severity[1], Extent[2], Duration[3], Frequency[4], Uniqueness and Fragility (U/F)	Probability impact will occur[5]	Cumulative impacts	Measures to reduce impact as proposed by Applicant	Significance (yes/no)
4. Vegetation Cover, Quantity, and Quality	A. Displacement of vegetation B. Weed propagation associated with surface disturbance	**Severity-Low:** The 3.12 acres of disturbance would be subject to the displacement of vegetation and the potential to propagate weeds. **Extent-Small:** Total surface disturbance subject to the displacement of vegetation and the potential to propagate weeds would be 3.12 acres. **Duration-Short Term:** Up to 2 years after completion or abandonment of exploration activities plus growing seasons. **Frequency-Twice:** After exploration and after reclamation activities. **Unique/Fragile:** Not unique or particularly fragile.	A. Certain B. Probable	The displacement of vegetation would add to cumulative impacts from previous agriculture and mining activities within the project area. Weed propagation generated from the proposed action would temporarily add to the cumulative impacts in other areas where weeds already exist within and near the proposed action area.	The Applicant proposes the use of; • washing and inspecting equipment prior to arrival and departure from the site • three years of disturbance monitoring and herbicide application as necessary to minimize the transmission of noxious weeds. - Any ground disturbed by exploration activities would be reclaimed upon completion of their use.	No
5. Terrestrial, Avian, and Aquatic Life and Habitats	Increased ambient noise and the displacement of animals	**Severity-Low:** 3.12 acres of disturbance and associated activities would cause temporary animal displacement from the project area. **Extent-Small:** Increased ambient noise would impact animals where sound has not been obstructed by topography or forested vegetation. Any displaced animal could find other suitable habitats nearby and return to the project area shortly after the proposed action's conclusion. **Duration-Short Term:** Reclamation would be required within 2 years after completion or abandonment of exploration activities plus growing seasons. **Frequency-Daily**: During exploration and reclamation activities. **Unique/Fragile:** Not unique or particularly fragile.	Probable	No cumulative impacts to terrestrial, Avian, and Aquatic Life and Habitats would be expected.	None	No
6. Unique, Endangered, Fragile, or Limited Environmental Resources	Displacement of unique or endangered animals	**Severity-Low:** 3.12 acres of disturbance would cause temporary animal displacement from the project area. **Extent-Small:** Increased ambient noise would impact animals where sound has not been obstructed by topography or forested vegetation. Any displaced animal could find other suitable habitats nearby and return to the project area shortly after the proposed action's conclusion. **Duration-Short Term:** Reclamation would be required within 2 years after completion or abandonment of exploration activities plus growing seasons. **Frequency-Daily:** During exploration and reclamation activities. **Unique/Fragile:** Not unique or particularly fragile.	Possible	No cumulative impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources would be expected.	None	No
7. Historical and Archaeological Sites	No anticipated impacts	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No

Affected Resource and Section Reference	Potential Impact	Severity[1], Extent[2], Duration[3], Frequency[4], Uniqueness and Fragility (U/F)	Probability impact will occur[5]	Cumulative impacts	Measures to reduce impact as proposed by Applicant	Significance (yes/no)
8. Aesthetics	Proposed action visibility and noise	**Severity-Medium:** Receptors would view heavy equipment, equipment related to drilling, and equipment transportation. Receptors would hear noise from sources including operation of heavy equipment, construction, and travel. **Extent-Small:** The noise and visual impacts would be visible to receptors from observation points unobstructed by topography or forested lands. Noise may be heard by receptors located in an area where sound related to the proposed action has not been fully diminished. **Duration-Short Term:** Reclamation would be required within 2 years after completion or abandonment of exploration activities plus growing seasons. **Frequency- Daily:** During exploration and reclamation activities. **Unique/Fragile:** Not unique or particularly fragile.	Certain	Impacts to area aesthetics generated from this proposed action could temporarily add to the cumulative impacts associated with travel and previous exploration activities conducted in the area.	None	No
9. Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, Air, or Energy	Water usage	**Severity-Low:** The proposed action would utilize up to 20,000 gallons of water per day during exploration operations. **Extent-Small:** The water would be sourced from a pre-existing water supply. **Duration-Short Term:** Water would be consumed during drilling operations and would return to the agricultural irrigation supply upon the conclusion of operations. **Frequency- Daily:** During exploration and reclamation activities. **Unique/Fragile**-Not unique or particularly fragile.	Certain	Consumption of up to 20,000 gallons of water per day could temporarily add to the cumulative impacts associated with other water use in the area.	None	No
10. Impacts on Other Environmental Resources	No anticipated impacts	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No
11. Human Health and Safety	Possible inhalation, ingestion, or contact with dust	**Severity-Low:** Only exploration staff would be in the immediate vicinity during exploration activities. **Extent-Small:** Within the immediate area of operating equipment. **Duration-Short Term:** Respiration of exhaust fumes and the ingestion of dust produced by heavy equipment would only occur during exploration or reclamation activities. Reclamation would be required within 2 years after completion or abandonment of exploration activities, plus growing seasons. **Frequency- Daily:** During exploration and reclamation activities. **Unique/Fragile**- Not unique or particularly fragile.	Unlikely	No cumulative impacts on human health and safety would be expected from the proposed action.	N/A	No
12. Industrial, Commercial, and Agricultural Activities and Production	No anticipated impacts	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No
13. Quantity and Distribution of Employment	No anticipated impacts	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No
14. Local and State Tax Base and Tax Revenues	Wages, withheld taxes, and local spending	**Severity-Low:** Workers and the companies participating in the proposed action. **Extent-Small:** The limited scale of the proposed action would only employ a small number of individuals.	N/A	The proposed action would provide only a small, temporary addition to the existing local and state tax base	None	No

Affected Resource and Section Reference	Potential Impact	Severity[1], Extent[2], Duration[3], Frequency[4], Uniqueness and Fragility (U/F)	Probability impact will occur[5]	Cumulative impacts	Measures to reduce impact as proposed by Applicant	Significance (yes/no)
		Duration-Short Term: Workers and the company would only have the opportunity to collect wages, withhold taxes, and spend locally related to the proposed action during operations and within 2 years after completion or abandonment of exploration activities, plus growing seasons. **Frequency- Daily:** During exploration and reclamation activities. **Unique/Fragile-** Not unique or particularly fragile.		associated with other economic activity in the greater project area.		
15. Demand for Government Services	Increased traffic	**Severity-Low:** Traffic would increase on a small number of public roads within the greater project area. **Extent-Small:** Increased traffic would occur along the local and public roads in the immediate vicinity of the project area. **Duration-Short Term:** Increased vehicle traffic would only occur during operations and within 2 years after completion or abandonment of exploration activities, plus growing seasons. **Frequency- Daily:** During exploration and reclamation activities. **Unique/Fragile-** Not unique or particularly fragile.	Certain	No cumulative impacts to demand on government services would be expected from the proposed action.	None	No
16. Locally Adopted Environmental Plans and Goals	No anticipated impacts	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No
17. Access to and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities	Project visibility and noise	**Severity-Medium:** Receptors would view heavy equipment, equipment related to drilling, and equipment transportation. Receptors would hear noise from sources including the operation of heavy equipment, construction, and travel. **Extent-Small:** The proposed action could generate impacts similar to those described in "Section 8. Aesthetics" to recreationists in the immediately surrounding BLM lands. **Duration-Short Term:** Project visibility and noise would only occur during operations and within 2 years after completion or abandonment of exploration activities, plus growing seasons. **Frequency- Daily:** During exploration and reclamation activities. **Unique/Fragile-** Not unique or particularly fragile.	Certain	The proposed action would add impacts similar to those described in "Section 8. Aesthetics." These visual and noise effects are expected to be minor and temporary, with final reclamation required within 2 years after exploration concludes.	N/A	No
18. Density and Distribution of Population and Housing	No anticipated impacts	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No
19. Social Structures and Mores	No anticipated impacts	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No
20. Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	No anticipated impacts	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No

1. Severity describes the density at which the impact may occur. Levels used are low, medium and high.
2. Extent describes the land area over which the impact may occur. Levels used are small, medium, and large.
3. Duration describes the time period over which the impact may occur. Descriptors used are discrete time increments (day, month, year, and season).
4. Frequency describes how often the impact may occur.
5. Probability describes how likely it is that the impact may occur without mitigation. Levels used are: impossible, unlikely, possible, probable, certain

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