

WRH NEVADA PROPERTIES, LLC.

EXPLORATION LICENSE No. 00906

Amendment No. 1

**CROSSOVER PROJECT
FLATHEAD COUNTY, MT**

**August 11, 2026
Draft Environmental Assessment**

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

COMPANY NAME: WRH Nevada Properties, LLC.
EA DATE: August 12, 2026
PROJECT: Crossover
PERMIT/LICENSE: Exploration License No. 00906
AMENDMENT #: Amendment 1 (AMD 1)

Location

(47.903106°, -114.627178°) County: Flathead

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 (AMD 1) to Exploration License No. 00906 (Exploration License) for WRH Nevada Properties, LLC (Applicant) – Crossover 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 July 1, 2026, the Applicant submitted a complete application for an Exploration License Amendment (AMD 1). Pursuant to 82-4-332(2), MCA, the application was complete and acceptable.

The Applicant proposes this action to assess the commercial potential of an ore deposit using underground exploration methods on private land located in Flathead County, Montana, approximately 40 miles northwest of Polson, MT.

The Plan of Operations submitted on April 22, 2026, includes 4 drill sites, each with 1 drill hole and a single two-celled internal drill sump. Total depth of all drill holes would be up to 14,500 feet, including 3 holes drilled to a maximum depth of 3,500 feet, and 1 hole drilled to a maximum depth of 4,000 feet from the surface. The drill pads would be constructed up to a maximum of 220 feet by 150 feet by 1.5 feet deep. The two-cell internal drill sumps would be constructed on each pad; the first cell on each pad would be excavated to a maximum total dimension of up to 12 feet long by 12 feet wide and up to 6 feet deep, and the second cell on each pad would be excavated to a maximum total dimension of 8 feet long by 8 feet wide and up to 5 feet deep. A single laydown area approximately 110 feet by 105 feet would be constructed to a depth of 1 foot. The applicant is proposing up to 2.48 acres of total new surface disturbance.

The Applicant proposes that the exploration operations be completed no later than **September 15, 2027**, and the reclamation operations be completed no later than **November 1, 2027**.

Table 1: Summary of Activities Proposed in Application

Summary of Proposed Activities in Application	
General Overview	WRH Nevada Properties, LLC. (Applicant) proposes underground exploration activities on private lands located in Sections 24 and 25, Township 25 North, Range 24 West, located in Flathead County, Montana, approximately 40 miles northwest of Polson, MT. The proposed action includes 4 drill sites, each with 1 drill hole and a single two-celled internal drill sump. Total depth of all drill holes would be up to 14,500 feet, including 3 holes drilled to a maximum depth of 3,500 feet, and 1 hole drilled to a maximum depth of 4,000 feet from the surface. The drill pads would be constructed up to a maximum of 220 feet by 150 feet by 1.5 feet deep. The two-cell internal drill sumps would be constructed on each pad; the first cell on each pad would be excavated to a maximum total dimension of up to 12 feet long by 12 feet wide and up to 6 feet deep, and the second cell on each pad would be excavated to a maximum total dimension of 8 feet long by 8 feet wide and up to 5 feet deep. A single laydown area approximately 110 feet by 105 feet would be constructed to a depth of 1 foot. The applicant is proposing up to 2.48 acres of total new surface disturbance. The Applicant proposes that the exploration operations be completed no later than September 15, 2027, and the reclamation operations be completed no later than November 1, 2027. Final reclamation of all surface 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 (#)	4
Drill pad dimensions (xyz)	220 feet by 150 feet by 1.5 feet
Internal Drill Sumps (#)	4
Internal Drill Sump Dimensions (xyz)	Cell #1; 12 feet by 12 feet by 6 feet Cell #2; 8 feet by 8 feet by 5 feet
Drill Holes (#)	4
Maximum Drill Hole Depth (z)	4,000 feet
Total Drill Hole Footage (z)	14,500 feet

Laydown Area (#)	1
Laydown Area Dimension (xyz)	110 feet by 105 feet by 1.5 feet
Total new surface disturbance	2.48 acres
Specific Proposed Activities	
Duration and timing	The Applicant proposes that the exploration operations be completed no later than September 15, 2027, and the reclamation operations be completed no later than November 1, 2027. Work hours are estimated to be up to 24 hours per day (2 x 12-hour shifts), up to 7 days per week. 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 - Drill Rig (Boart Longyear LF-230) • 2 - Water Truck (International 4800) • 1 - Backhoe (Cat 420) • 1 - Telehandler (Genie or Sany, 10,000 lb) • 1 - ATV or UTV (Polaris Sportsman 850) • 2 - Generator (Shindaiwa 14 KVA) • 4 - 1-ton 4x4 Pickup Trucks (Chevrolet 3500) • 1 - Solids Removal Unit (Paramount 40 GPM, 1,077 kg) • 1 - Portable light plant
Location and analysis area	Location: 47.903106°, -114.627178° Distance from the nearest town/city: On private lands in Sections 24 and 25, Township 25 North, Range 24 West, located in Flathead County, Montana, approximately 40 miles northwest of Polson, MT. 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 Location Map and any other maps below.
Personnel on-site	• 1 - WRH Contract Geologist • 1 - WRH Chief Geologist • 1 - Driller (Contract) • 2 - Driller Helper (Contract) • 2 - Other WRH or Contract Drilling Personnel
Structures	• 2 - Portable toilets • 1 - Connex/Containers (20 feet x 8 feet x 9 feet)

	• 3 - Trash Cans (45 gallon) • 4 - Gasoline Containers (2.5 gallons) • 2 - Diesel Fuel Tanks (100 gallons) • 25 - Lubricants (1-gallon) • 2 - Water tanks (2,000 gallons) • 1 - Water Pump (FMC Model 35) • 2,500 feet of 1" temporary water lines
Proposed action water source	The Applicant proposes to purchase drilling water from the City of Hot Springs municipal water system, located in Section 3 and 4, Township 21 North, Range 24 West, and transport it to the drill site using two 2,000-gallon water trucks. Up to 16,000 gallons of water per day would be used during drilling operations, which may require up to 8 round trips per day to the drill site combined.
Air quality	The Applicant proposes that if fugitive dust is observed, vehicles would travel at a reduced speed. 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 dusk to dawn each day. 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 and directional lighting.
Water quality	To minimize impacts on water quality, the Applicant has proposed the use of the following BMPs: compacted earthen berms, plastic liners, 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: compacted earthen berms, plastic liners, and spill prevention and response kits. The Applicant is required to comply with the applicable local, county, state, and federal requirements pertaining to erosion control and sediment transport.
Solid waste	The Applicant proposes that any solid wastes produced by the operation would be stored in three 45-gallon trash cans and hauled off-site for disposal at the Republic Services facility in Polson, MT as necessary. 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 the Applicant will not knowingly disturb, alter, injure, or destroy any scientifically important paleontological deposits, or any historical or archaeological site, structure, building or object. If the Applicant discovers any cultural

	or paleontological resource that may be altered or destroyed by operations, the discovery will be left intact and reported to the landowner, Flathead Ridge Ranch, Montana SHPO and the Flathead County Sheriff. The Applicant is required to comply with the applicable local, county, state, and federal requirements pertaining to cultural resources.
Hazardous substances	The Applicant proposes: • 100 gallons of diesel fuel would be transported in a 2 pickup-mounted fuel tank to the drill pad on a daily basis. • 10 gallons of gasoline would be stored on site in up to four 2.5-gallon containers • 25 gallons of lubricants would be stored in 1-gallon plastic buckets or other spill-proof containers and placed within secondary containment to capture spills. • All hazardous substances would be located in a properly secured storage, and that storage would utilize secondary containment in case of an accidental release. The Applicant must adhere to all applicable local, county, state, and federal regulations concerning hazardous substances.
Reclamation Plans	Concurrent Reclamation: The Applicant proposes that, once drilling is complete, the drill sumps would be allowed to dry, then backfilled, and the sump and drill pad recontoured as needed to minimize erosion. Because the area is heavily grazed by cattle, reseeding of disturbed lands would be scheduled after the landowner has moved cattle to fall grazing areas. Reseeding would also be timed to occur just prior to precipitation events to minimize trampling of reclaimed areas and to ensure adequate soil moisture for seed establishment. Final Reclamation: End-of-season reclamation would include returning disturbed ground to the original slope, discing, and seeding with an approved seed mix. Weed Control Plan: The Applicant proposes that spot-pulling of weeds, along with a broadleaf post-emergent herbicide, would be used to control the spread of noxious weeds. Structures to Remain: The Applicant proposes that no new project-related disturbance or structures would remain unreclaimed after completion of the proposed action. Should the Applicant propose that any structures or disturbances remain following the completion of the proposed action, at the request of the landowner, Flathead Ridge Ranch, the Applicant shall submit a statement describing the proposed legitimate post-mining land use, subject to review by the DEQ.

Cumulative Impact Considerations	
General setting	The proposed project area features montane grasslands, conifer-dominated forest and woodland, and deciduous shrubland. Many roads and previously mined and reclaimed areas associated with forestry, exploration and mining activities are present within the analyzed area.
Past actions	Past actions in the area include forestry, grazing, mining, mining-related activities, and exploration for lode deposits periodically from the mid-1800's to the present. More recently, mining and exploration in the greater project area has been conducted by other entities, including Brixton USA Corporation under Exploration License No. 00826 and Operating Permit No. 00123 for the Hog Heaven Mine; and Flathead Ridge Ranch, LLC under Operating Permit No. 00204 for the Red Rock site.
Present actions	<u>Exploration:</u> Brixton USA Corporation holds Exploration License No. 00826, and previously authorized activities under this license remain active, with drilling and reclamation proceeding for all bonded disturbances. DEQ is currently reviewing an additional proposed action under Exploration License No. 00826, located in Section 16, Township 25 North, Range 23 West, which would authorize drilling up to 177,120 feet from as many as 27 drill holes located on 10 drill pads. <u>Mining:</u> No other Small Miner Exclusion, Exploration Licenses, or Operating Permits are active within the greater project area. <u>Other:</u> The area has been extensively grazed and previously logged. Many pre-existing logging roads are present on private land, including Crossover Road. Local traffic exists along the existing public roads, including Battle Butte Road and Montana Highway 2, between the proposed action's water source location in Hot Springs, MT, and the drilling area.
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

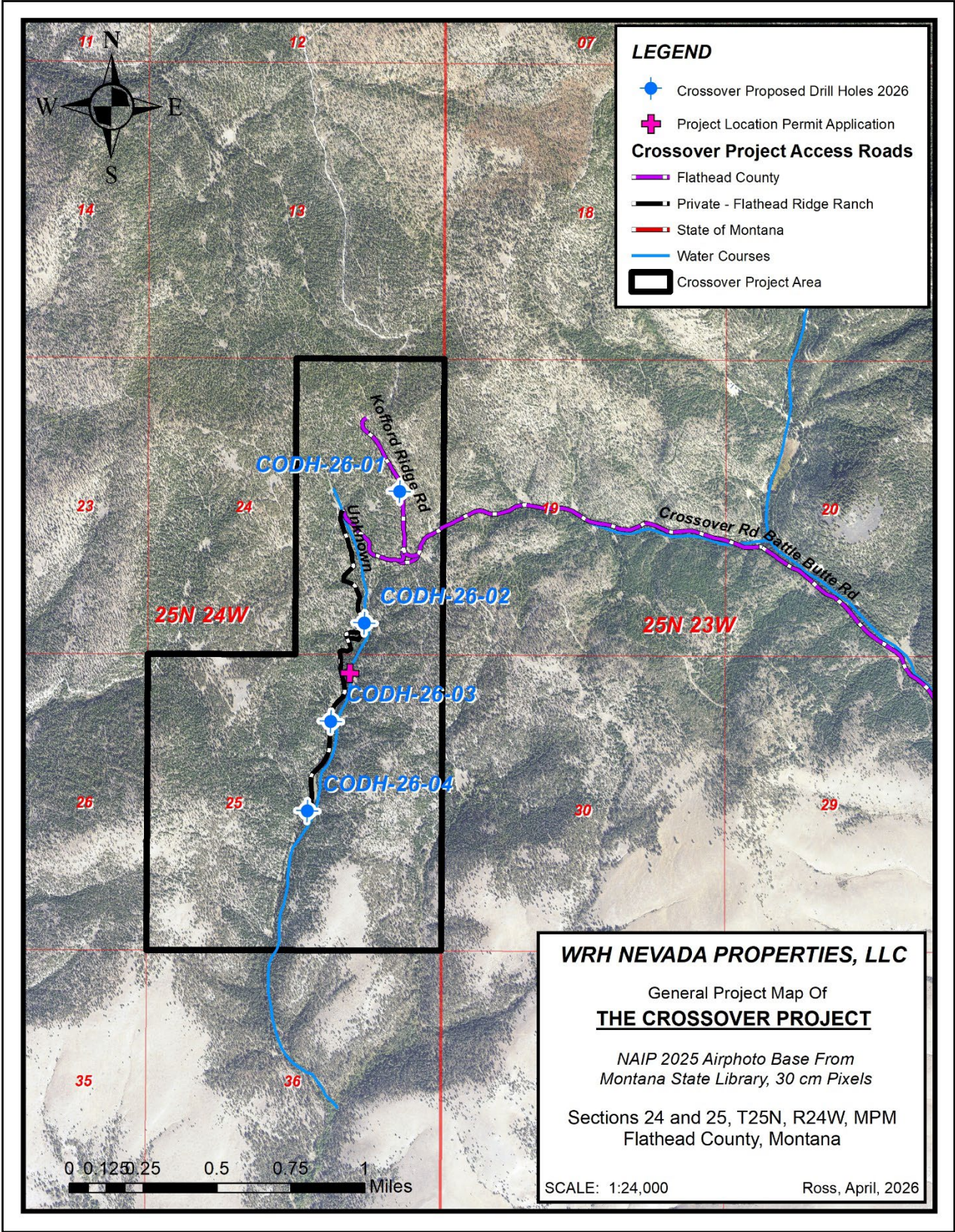


Figure 2: Map of Proposed Exploration Activities in Crossover Project Area (North)

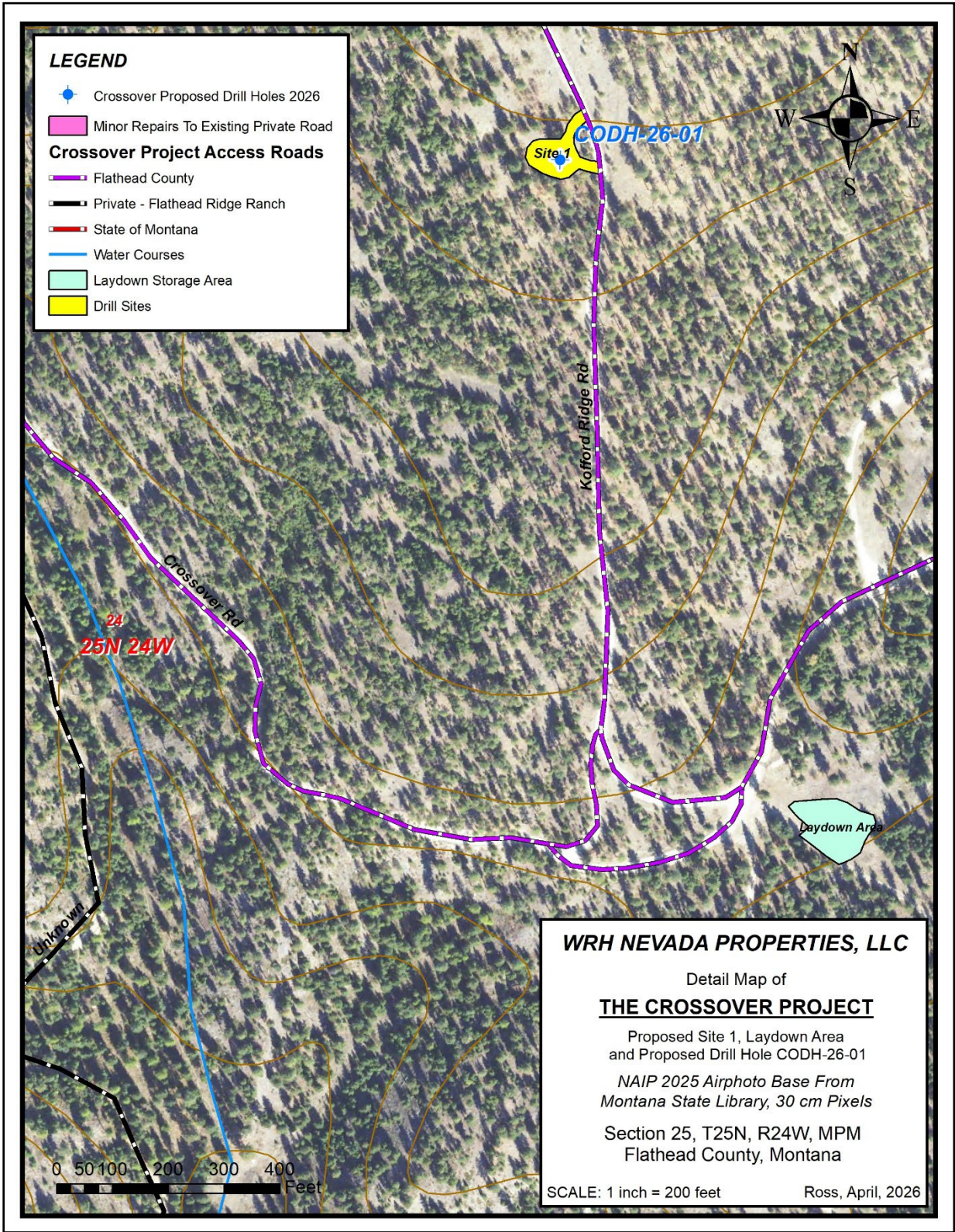


Figure 3: Map of Proposed Exploration Activities in Crossover Project Area (Central)

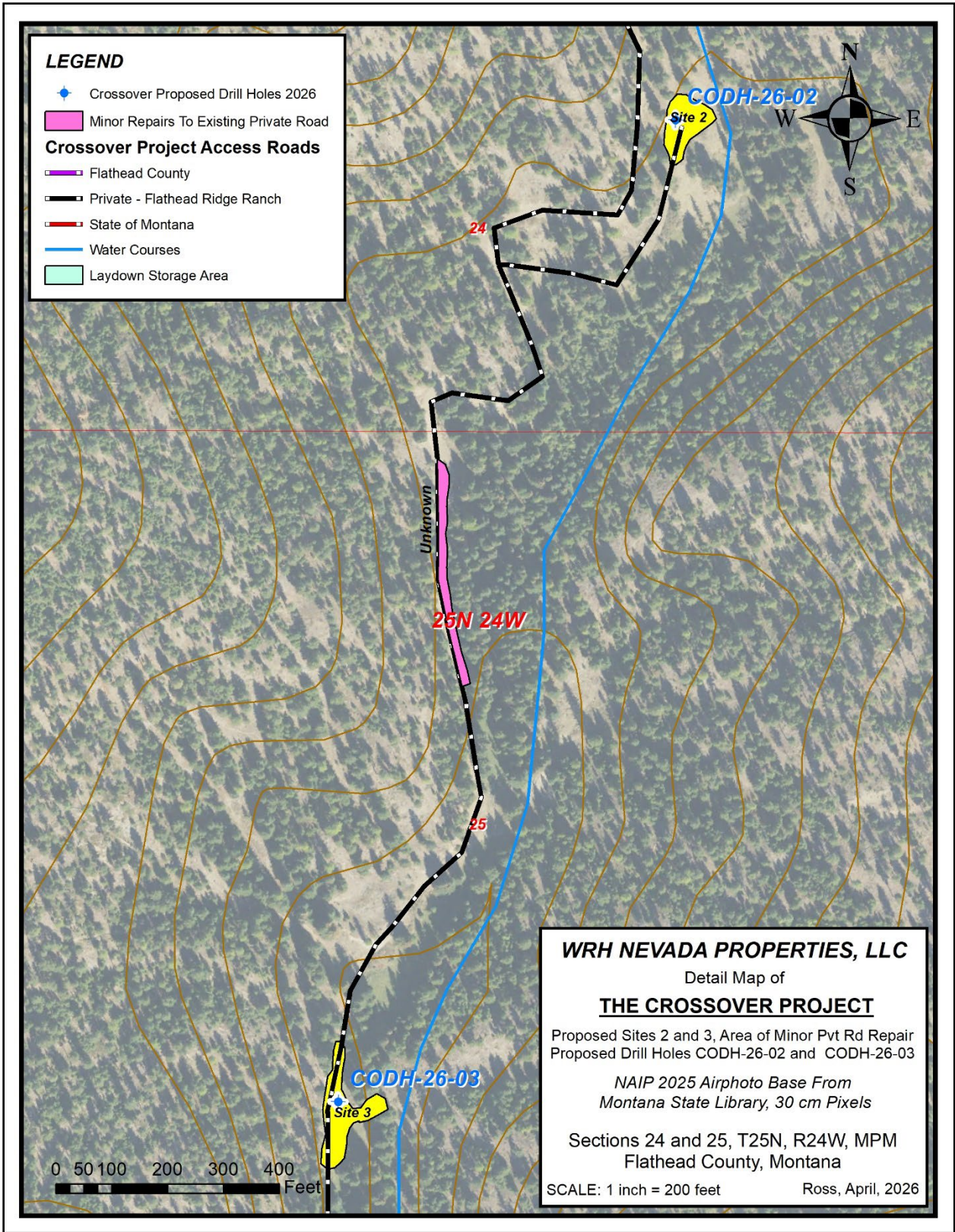
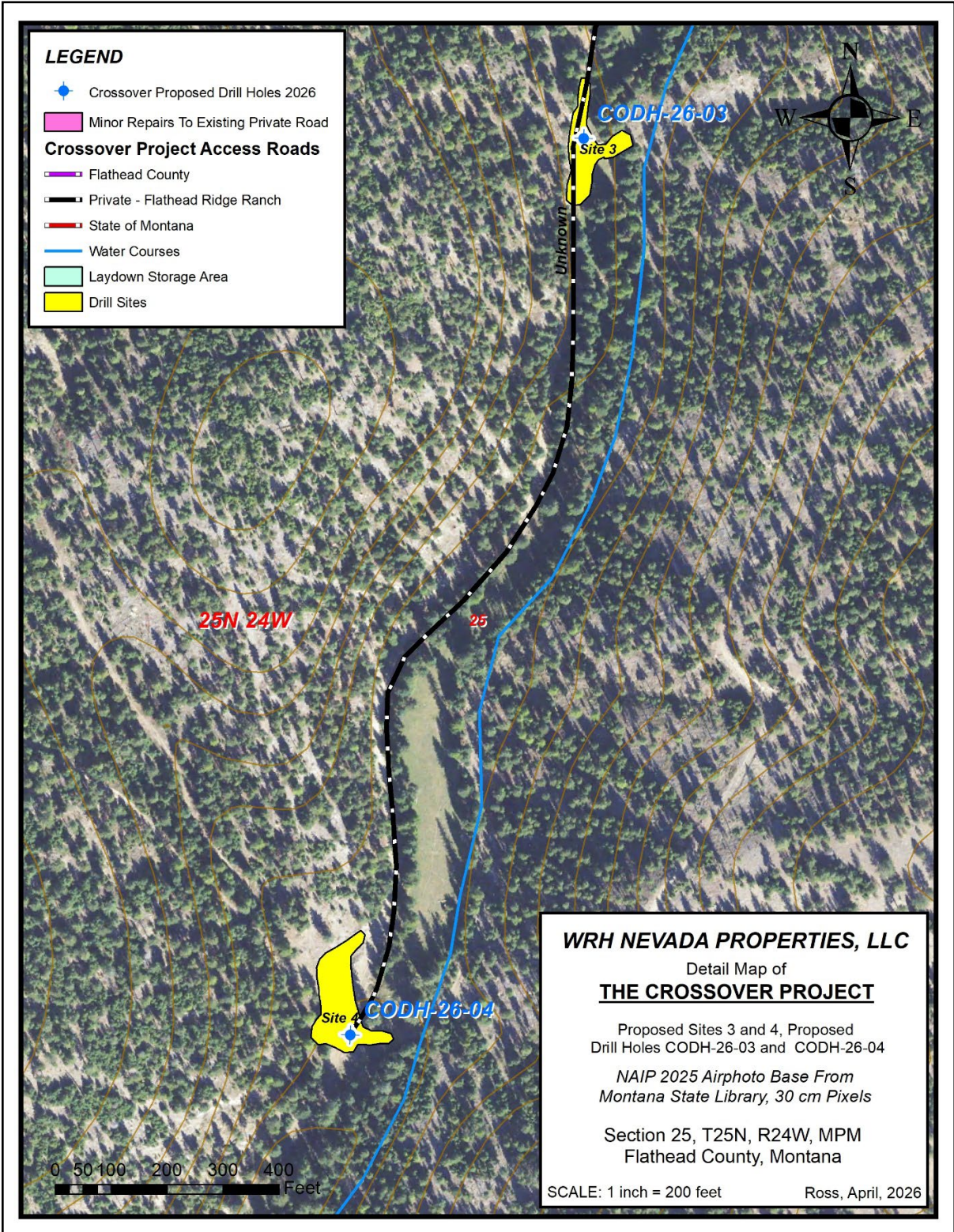


Figure 4: Map of Proposed Exploration Activities in Crossover Project Area (South)



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 40 miles northwest of Polson, in Flathead County, Montana, in a region not previously designated as a Mining District. It is adjacent to the historic Flathead Mine in the Hog Heaven Mining District, which has been extensively disturbed since the 1930s.

Hog Heaven Mining District

The Hog Heaven Mining District is underlain mainly by nearly flat-lying Belt Supergroup argillites of the Ravalli and Wallace formations, unconformably overlain in places by Pleistocene lake silts and clays, and intruded and covered by Tertiary volcanic rocks. The principal ore bodies occur in intrusive porphyritic latite near the Flathead Mine, where intense hydrothermal alteration produced silicified rocks hosting silver-lead mineralization formed at shallow depth during late Tertiary igneous activity. Silver ore float was first discovered near the present Flathead Mine in 1913, leading the Anaconda Copper Mining Company to sink an initial shaft, which was later abandoned. The ore body was rediscovered in 1928, which triggered renewed development and shipments of up to 20,000 tons of ore yielding about 500,000 ounces of silver, with associated lead and gold (Shenon and Taylor, 1936).

Soil Types

The proposed project area consists of 882 acres of soil with a slight erosion hazard rating for disturbances located off-road or off-trail, including Battlebutte-Bigdraw gravelly loams, moist, 8 to 30 percent slopes (557 acres). Soils with a slight erosion hazard rating indicate that erosion is unlikely under ordinary climatic conditions. The proposed project area also consists of 422 acres of soil with a moderate erosion hazard rating for disturbances located off-road or off-trail, including Winkler-Combest complex, on 8 to 35 percent slopes (157 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 remainder of the soil types in the proposed project area include:

Combest gravelly ashy silt loam, 15 to 35 percent slopes (107 acres), Pashua gravelly loam, 8 to 30 percent slopes (94 acres), Pashua-Pashua, deep complex, 8 to 30 percent slopes (66 acres), Tevis gravelly loam, dry 15 to 35 percent slopes (53 acres), Meadowpass gravelly loam, 2 to 8 percent slopes (44 acres), Battlebutte-Bigdraw gravelly loams, moist, 30 to 60 percent slopes (40 acres), Mitten gravelly ashy silt loam, dry, 15 to 35 percent slopes (34 acres), Battlebutte-Bigdraw-Rock outcrop, welded tuff complex, 15 to 30 percent slopes (34 acres), Battlebutte-Bigdraw gravelly loams, 15 to 30 percent slopes (33 acres), Bigarm gravelly loam, cool, 15 to 30 percent slopes (25 acres), Rumblecreek-Courville complex, dry, 4 to 15 percent slopes (20 acres), Lozeau gravelly loam, 8 to 30 percent slopes (16 acres), Pashua-Battlebutte, moist-rock outcrop, welded tuff complex, 30 to 60 percent slopes (13 acres), Finleypoint gravelly loam, moist, 15 to 30 percent slopes (8 acres), Mitten gravelly ashy silt loam, 15 to 35 percent slopes (4 acres), Bigarm gravelly loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes (1 acre).

No unusual or unstable geologic features are present, and no fragile or distinctly erosive, unstable soils are expected to be present.

The analysis area for geology and soils in the proposed project area and immediately surrounding landscape is in Flathead 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 the use of compacted earthen berms, plastic liners, and spill prevention and response kits as best management practices (BMPs) to minimize erosion and sediment transport offsite.

Direct Impacts:

The proposed action would result in soil and rock displacement associated with the construction of drill pads, sumps and laydown areas, as described in Table 1. The Applicant proposes to construct 4 new drill pads, each with a maximum dimension of 220 feet by 150 feet. Each pad would include a single two-cell internal drill sump measuring approximately 20 feet by 20 feet and up to 6 feet deep, as well as a laydown area approximately 110 feet by 105 feet. Total new surface disturbance would be approximately 2.48 acres.

Maximum drill depths of any hole would not exceed 4,000 feet, with a combined total footage of no more than 14,500 feet. Subsurface materials would be removed during drilling; the volume of core and rock chip samples generated would be negligible compared to the volume of soil and rock displaced during surface excavation.

Secondary Impacts:

The proposed action could result in soil disturbance and minor subsequent erosion of disturbed soil, and sediment could be transported offsite via stormwater. 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 proposed project area. The additional disturbance of up to 2.48 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 proposed project area vicinity.

2. Water Quality, Quantity, and Distribution

Surface Water and Runoff:

The greater project area is located within a 1.41-square-mile sub-basin of the Mill Pocket Creek-Little Bitterroot River watershed. The drainage basin receives a mean annual precipitation of 19.24 inches (StreamStats, 2026). The project sub-basin contains an unnamed ephemeral drainage (USGS Hydrography). The closest proposed surface disturbance from drill pad CODH-26-03 is approximately 50-100 feet upgradient from the ephemeral stream.

The Crossover project area is adjacent to the following riparian classifications: 37 acres of riparian systems, comprised of forested (Rp1FO) and emergent lotic systems (Rp1EM) (MTNHP, 2026). No mapped wetlands are located within the immediate project area.

Groundwater: Drill Site Areas

Groundwater may be encountered during drilling operations as the deepest proposed drill hole may reach up to 4,000 feet from the surface; however, no static groundwater level data are available due to the lack of existing water wells within the immediate project area. In the absence of site-specific groundwater information in the drill site areas, the Applicant has not proposed any groundwater-specific control measures beyond standard regulatory requirements. If groundwater is intercepted, the Applicant must comply with the drill hole plugging rules detailed in ARM 17.24.106.

Groundwater: Water Supply Area

Water necessary for drilling operations would be sourced from the municipal water system located in Hot Springs, Montana, in Sections 3 and 4, Township 21 North, Range 24 West. The municipal system, which is available for bulk water purchases, is supplied by three existing wells, identified by the Groundwater Information Center (GWIC) Nos. 76182, 6154 and 6155. These three wells have a maximum total depth of 804 feet, an average static water level of 18 feet and an average yield of up to 263 gallons per minute. The Applicant proposes that approximately 16,000 gallons of water per day would be used during drilling operations and transported to the drill site by up to two 2,000-gallon water trucks which would require up to eight round trips per day combined. No new surface disturbance is proposed at the water supply location. Water associated with the proposed action would be used to cool and lubricate the drill bit, clean the bit-rock interface to optimize cutting performance, and carry drill cuttings out of the hole. Wet drilling also suppresses dust for safer working conditions for drilling personnel.

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 using storage tanks, sumps, or dispose of the fluids or waste in accordance with an approved plan.

In the event a release of drilling fluid took place, it may be considered a violation of ARM 17.24.105. Practically, the drilling fluids would be handled similar to fuel or water release. The drilling fluids would be expected to act as a thin mud or paste with increased viscosity (i.e., decreased fluidity), and could be contained within the drill pad area by the erosion control and sediment transport BMPs. The Applicant proposes the use of compacted earthen berms, plastic liners, and secondary containment to minimize sediment transport off-site and minimize impacts to surface waters.

Groundwater: Drill Site Areas

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 4,000 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 required to be reclaimed in accordance with ARM 17.24.106, which includes plugging with bentonite or a similar compound from the bottom of the hole to within five to ten feet of the surface, and with cement from the top of the bentonite to the surface. The proposed surface drilling activity, and the resulting drillholes prior to plugging, are unlikely to influence the elevation or the quality of groundwater.

Groundwater: Water Supply Area

The proposed activities at the water source include the withdraw of up to 16,000 gallons of water per day and filling a water transport truck to convey water from the source location to the drilling project area. Any water potentially spilled during transfer of fresh water from the municipal water source to the transport truck would 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 up to 16,000 gallons of water per day from the municipal water source, would represent similar demand for the well from other existing public 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.

Secondary Impacts:

Storm water impacting the sites during a precipitation event would generally be expected to infiltrate into the subsurface, however, storm water leaving the sites could carry sediment from the disturbed soils and non-sediment contaminants from drilling operations. The Applicant proposes the use of compacted earthen berms, plastic liners, 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 could add a small, temporary increment of disturbance to a watershed already affected by recent logging and cattle-grazing operations in the water drainage basin. Because the proposed action would disturb only a limited area on or near previously disturbed ground, implement erosion and sediment-control BMPs, proposes to use drilling fluids managed in lined sumps, reclaim all drill holes in accordance with ARM 17.24.106, and obtain up to approximately 16,000 gallons per day of water from an existing municipal water system rather than develop new water sources, its contribution to cumulative impacts on surface-water and groundwater quality is expected to be minor.

3. Air Quality

The Flathead Reservation is the closest Class 1 Airshed to the proposed project area, less than one-mile due south. The immediate area complies with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

The Applicant proposes to reduce speed while traveling to minimize impacts to air quality. Wet drilling would suppress dust, improving working conditions for drilling personnel. 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 exhaust fumes. Dust would also be produced while traveling along existing roads to and from the proposed 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 Flathead Reservation 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

Land cover in the greater project area, mapped using the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP, 2026), varies and is predominantly classified as forest and woodland, grassland, human use, recently disturbed or modified, shrubland, steppe and savanna and wetland and riparian systems. These systems include Rocky Mountain Lower Montane, Foothill, and Valley grassland (5,016 acres); Rocky Mountain dry-mesic montane mixed conifer forest (3,481 acres); Rocky Mountain montane-foothill deciduous shrubland (341 acres); Rocky Mountain mesic montane mixed conifer forest (796 acres); other roads (129 acres); Rocky Mountain Ponderosa Pine woodland and savanna (188 acres); Rocky Mountain subalpine-montane mesic meadow (75 acres); harvested forest-grass regeneration (65 acres); harvested forest-tree regeneration (57 acres); Rocky Mountain Subalpine Mesic Spruce-Fir forest and woodland (26 acres); recently burned forest (13 acres); Northern Rocky Mountain lower montane riparian woodland and shrubland (20 acres); harvested forest-shrub regeneration (6 acres); Rocky Mountain Subalpine Dry-Mesic Spruce-Fir forest and woodland (6 acres); Alpine-Montane wet meadow (5 acres); insect-killed forest (4 acres); and Aspen forest and woodland (1 acre) (MTNHP, 2026).

A search of the MTNHP in the proposed project area identified vascular plant/lichen habitats and potential habitats for 25 Species of Concern (SOC) and 4 Potential Species of Concern (PSOC). The USFS Species of Conservation Concern in Forests search identified 11 vascular plant or lichen SOC and 9 vascular plants or lichen classified as sensitive. The BLM has classified 1 vascular plant as sensitive and zero as threatened.

Direct Impacts:

The vegetation cover as described above would be removed or disturbed within the approximately 2.48 acres of proposed surface disturbance. 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, and other proposed action disturbances related to exploration activities.

Secondary Impacts:

Land disturbance at the site may result in the propagation of noxious weeds. Any surface disturbances would be reclaimed and seeded with a weed-free seed mix. The project area would be subject to the 2017 Montana Noxious Weed Management Plan and any additional measures required by the Flathead 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 existing roads and from previous logging and ranch operation activities within the proposed project area. Reclaimed areas are expected to re-establish cover comparable to surrounding disturbed lands.

5. Terrestrial, Avian, and Aquatic Life and Habitats

The proposed action has the potential to temporarily impact 2.48 acres of terrestrial, avian and/or aquatic habitat and temporarily displace species occurring within the proposed disturbance area. Common wildlife, such as birds, mammals, amphibians, and invertebrates, may utilize the project area and may be temporarily displaced while machinery and equipment are operating. Displaced wildlife would be expected to find other suitable habitats in the surrounding undeveloped area and return to the project area following completion of exploration and reclamation activities. See further discussion regarding the greater sage-grouse in “Section 6. Unique, Endangered, Fragile or Limited Environmental Resources”.

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. 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.

Cumulative Impacts:

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

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

A search of the MTNHP identified potential habitats for 28 amphibian, bird, invertebrate, reptile, and mammal SOC, and 9 PSOC (MTNHP, 2026). Habitat for these species is common and not unique to the proposed project area.

A search of MTNHP in the project area identified bird, invertebrate, fish, and mammal habitats and potential habitats for 37 SOC and 10 PSOC. The USFS Species of Conservation Concern in Forests search identified 11 species as sensitive. The BLM has classified 17 species as sensitive and 4 as threatened. Habitat for these species is common and not unique to the project area.

Habitat for all other species within the proposed 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.

Direct Impacts:

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. Impacts to noise levels are further discussed in "Section 8. Aesthetics." The proposed action is not proposing to disturb wetlands or riparian habitat.

Secondary Impacts:

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.

Cumulative Impacts:

Cumulative impacts on other unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources from the proposed action could add to existing impacts from previous logging and ranching activities in the project area's immediate vicinity.

7. Historical and Archaeological Sites

The Montana Cultural Resource Database under the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) indicates that there are two inventoried and historical sites within the greater project area. The proposed exploration activities are located on private lands. SHPO recommends that any structure over fifty years of age be considered historic and potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and any such sites be recorded, and determination of their eligibility be made prior to any disturbance taking place.

The Applicant proposes to not knowingly disturb, alter, injure or destroy any scientifically important paleontological deposits, or any historical or archeological site, structure, building, or object. If the Applicant discovers any cultural or paleontological resource during exploration or reclamation activities, the Applicant proposes to leave the discovery intact and report the finding to SHPO and the landowner. 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. Portions of the proposed project area are located adjacent to public county and private roads throughout the greater project area, however, the area is sparsely populated, typical to the remote forest system setting in the adjacent lands. The project area would be visible to the public traveling along local county roads. There would be no permanent change 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.

The Applicant proposes to perform two 12-hour shifts, 24 hours a day. One portable light plant (Table 1) would be deployed at the project area as necessary for low light operations, from approximately dusk to dawn, adjusted seasonally as necessary. Light pollution controls proposed include the use of downward-facing, directional lighting. Portable light towers are widely used on a variety of construction sites. The primary advantages of portable lights are their ability to be positioned at different sections within and across the work zone. The mounting heights typically range from six feet to a fully extended 30 feet and the light pole is usually rotatable 360 degrees. Other lighting systems used that could be used during operation would be lights on headlights from equipment and trucks (Nafakh, Davila, Zhang, et. Al, 2022).

Light impacts can be described in several forms. These forms of light impacts are described as spill light, glare, and sky glow. Spill light or stray light is the amount of light that leaves a specific site. Spill light can be controlled by taking measurement of vertical illuminance at the property boundary line or the edge of the road allowance (Nafakh, Davila, Zhang, et. al, 2022). Glare is the light that shines horizontally. Sky glow is a term that refers to the increased sky brightness

caused by electric light scattering into the atmosphere, most notably from outdoor lighting in urban areas (Nafakh, Davila, Zhang, et. al, 2022).

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 pads, sumps, and other disturbances. Aesthetic impacts from exploration and reclamation activities would include views of heavy equipment like the drill rig, excavations, passenger vehicles, and miscellaneous equipment related to drilling and reclamation. The light plant may be visible to receptors during low-light operations. 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, lighting, and noise in the project area, within a landscape affected by travel and previous exploration logging and ranching 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 the City of Hot Springs municipal water system, located in Sections 3 and 4, Township 21 North, Range 24 West. The municipal system, which is available for bulk water purchases, is supplied by three existing wells, identified by the Groundwater Information Center (GWIC) Nos. 76182, 6154 and 6155. These three wells have a maximum total depth of 804 feet, an average static water level of 18 feet and an average yield of up to 263 gallons per minute. The Applicant proposes that approximately 16,000 gallons of water per day would be used during drilling operations, and transported to the drill site by up to two 2,000-gallon water trucks which would require up to eight round trips per day combined. 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 16,000 gallons of water resources per day during drilling activities. No direct impacts of 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 16,000 gallons of water per day of well water would add a small increment to existing demands on the water table, and is not expected to measurably affect overall water availability or water table capacity. 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 Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
- Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
- Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)
- Flathead 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 be 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 dust generated by equipment during exploration operations and reclamation would be minimized with proper personal protection 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, and agricultural activities are known to occur in the project area.

Direct Impacts:

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

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts to industrial, commercial, and 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

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 the 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 project, minimal tax revenue from income, 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 local and state tax base and tax revenues would be expected from the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts:

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

16. Locally Adopted Environmental Plans and Goals

The proposed activities would occur on private lands. The project area would be subject to any plans or rules set forth by Flathead County, and the 2017 Montana Noxious Weed Management Plan.

Direct Impacts:

DEQ is not aware of any other locally-adopted environmental plans or goals that would impact this proposed action or the project area. Impacts from or to locally-adopted environmental plans and goals would not be expected as a result of this proposed action. The proposed exploration activities would occur on private lands.

Secondary Impacts:

No secondary impacts from or to locally adopted environmental plans and goals would be expected because of the proposed work.

Cumulative Impacts:

No cumulative impacts from or to locally adopted environmental plans and goals would be expected from the proposed action.

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

Flathead County had a population of approximately 104,357 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 to 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. 00906, 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. 00906 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. 00906. The Applicant would lack the authority to explore minerals on private lands. Any potential impacts authorized under

exploration License No. 00906 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 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)
- Flathead 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

The draft EA will be available to the public through the DEQ website, and the public will have 15 days to submit comments on the draft EA. The final EA will also be posted to the DEQ website once completed.

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 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 this action to assess the commercial potential of an ore deposit through exploration drilling. The plan includes the construction of drill sites and associated access roads to support the drilling program.

As described in this EA, the proposed action would authorize additional surface and underground exploration activities that would disturb up to approximately 2.48 acres, on private lands.

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 Table 1 and 2.

BMPs to minimize erosion, sediment movement, and water resource impacts include: the use of plastic liners, compacted earthen berms and spill prevention and response kits. Additionally, where possible, reclamation would include returning disturbed ground to the original slope, covering the area with stockpiled topsoil, and seeding with an approved seed mix. Spot pulling and application of a broadleaf post-emergent herbicide would be used to control the spread of noxious weeds.

BMPs to minimize impacts on air quality include requiring all vehicles to travel at reduced speeds.

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 emissions with an area already substantially affected by previous logging and ranching activities. Reclamation is required within two years after exploration is complete. The proposed action would use an existing water source (up to 16,000 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

logging and ranching 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. 00906, 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-Medium: Of the 2.48 acres of ground that would be disturbed, all disturbance aside from the construction of the drill pads would result in the displacement and movement of rock and soil. Drill cuttings/core and samples would be removed. Extent-Small: Total surface area susceptible to displacement would be 2.48 acres. Up to 14,500 linear feet of core would be removed. 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-Medium: Of the 2.48 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 2.48 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 logging and ranching activities within the proposed project area.	The Applicant proposes the use of: • Compacted earthen berms; • Plastic liners; and • Spill prevention and 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 16,000 gallons per day withdrawal at the proposed action water source.	Severity-Low: Of the 2.48 acres of ground that would be disturbed, all disturbance would be susceptible to erosion. The maximum depth proposed is 4,000 feet from the surface, which would intercept the water table. Up to 16,000 gallons per day would be consumed during drilling operations Extent-Small: Total surface disturbance susceptible to erosion would be 2.48 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 logging and ranching 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.	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	The Applicant proposes the use of; • reduced speed while traveling 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)
		Unique/Fragile: Not unique or particularly fragile.		area in the use of public lands near the proposed action.		
4. Vegetation Cover, Quantity, and Quality	A. Displacement of vegetation B. Weed propagation associated with surface disturbance	Severity-Medium: The 2.48 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 2.48 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 logging and ranching 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.	- Any ground disturbed by exploration activities would be seeded with an approved seed mix. - Weed control measures proposed by the Applicant include spot-pulling of weeds and application of post-emergent broadleaf herbicide.	No
5. Terrestrial, Avian, and Aquatic Life and Habitats	Increased ambient noise and the displacement of animals	Severity-Low: 2.48 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: 2.48 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
8. Aesthetics	Proposed action visibility and noise	Severity-Medium: Receptors would view heavy equipment, equipment related to drilling, and equipment transportation. Receptors could observe light during low-light operations from the	Certain	Impacts to area aesthetics generated from this proposed action could temporarily add to the cumulative impacts associated with	The following BMPs are proposed to minimize light pollution:	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)
		light plant in use. 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.		travel and previous exploration activities conducted in the area.	directional and downward facing lights	
9. Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, Air, or Energy	Water usage	Severity-Low: The proposed action would utilize up to 16,000-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 cease upon the conclusion of operations. Frequency- Daily: During exploration and reclamation activities. Unique/Fragile- Not unique or particularly fragile.	Certain	Consumption of up to 16,000 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 respiration, ingestion, or contract 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 be 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.	None	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 minor amount of individuals. Duration-Short Term: Workers and the company would only have opportunity to collect wages, withhold taxes, and spend locally	N/A	The proposed action would provide only a small, temporary addition to the existing local and state tax base associated with other economic activity in the Polson and Hot Springs, MT area.	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)
		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.				
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 could observe light during low-light operations from the light plant in use. 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.	None	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, 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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