



# United States Department of the Interior



## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Mother Lode Field Office  
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[www.blm.gov/ca/folsom](http://www.blm.gov/ca/folsom)

**EA Number:** CA-180-09-30

**Proposed Action:** Yellow Metals Mine stampmill removal project

**Location:** MDM, T 4 S, R 18 E, Section 16 SW ¼ NE ¼, Mariposa County (refer to the attached maps)

## 1.0 Purpose of and Need for Action

The BLM proposes to allow the Mariposa Museum and History Center (the Museum) to use heavy equipment to remove parts of a two-stamp mill located on BLM-administered land at the Yellow Metal Mine, along Saxon Creek, approximately 0.5 miles south of the Merced River. The Museum would use the parts for a public interpretative exhibit on the Museum grounds in Mariposa.

### 1.1 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Sierra Resource Management Plan's Record of Decision (ROD), approved in February 2008. Page 19 of the ROD states that BLM will develop interpretive information for the public in the Merced River area.

## 2.0 Proposed Action and Alternatives

### 2.1 Proposed Action

Under the proposed action, BLM would allow the Museum to remove stampmill parts and set them up for public display on the Museum grounds in Mariposa. Ponderosa Towing Company would be contracted by the Museum to recover the stampmill parts and haul them to the Museum grounds. The stampmill parts are bulky and heavy. The parts include the mortar box, camshaft, and two stamp stems. The Museum describes the way they would remove the parts in the attached letter by Ron Loya, president of the Museum's board of directors. To summarize, Ponderosa Towing would use a recovery vehicle and a hauling vehicle. The recovery vehicle is a 28-ft-long 2000 GMC boom-type wrecker with a gross weight of 33,000 lbs and a 133-inch wheelbase. The boom is able to extend 20 ft. The hauling vehicle is a 21 ½-ft-long 2004 GMC model 6500 flatbed truck with a gross weight of 19,500 lbs. The vehicles would access the site on a dirt existing road via Rancheria Creek Road, off of Colorado Road, in Midpines. There would be no new road construction or maintenance. The recovery vehicle would stage on the existing tailings' platform at the site, immediately next the area where BLM demolished the cabin and just above the area where the stampmill parts are currently located, on a low alluvial terrace along the east side of Saxon Creek. The boom would be extended and used to drag the parts from their current location to the hauling vehicle, also staged on the existing dirt access road and the tailings' platform. The mortar box is the farthest away from the tailings' platform and would be dragged approximately 100 ft. Minor surface disturbance from dragging the parts across the ground is anticipated. There would be no disturbance to the bed of Saxon Creek. Ron Loya would oversee the project.

## **2.2 Project Design Features**

To minimize the potential for introduction or spread of invasive weeds, all equipment used for the proposed action would be cleaned prior to entering the area and, where possible, would avoid operating within weed-infested areas, such as Himalayan blackberry.

## **2.3 No Action**

Under the no action alternative, BLM would not allow the Museum to remove the stampmill parts.

## **2.4 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis**

There are no alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed analysis.

## **3.0 Affected Environment**

The area of potential effects (APE) is at the Yellow Metals Mine, located along the east side of Saxon Creek, at about 2300 ft above sea level, within the Merced River canyon, in the central Sierra Nevada. The mouth of Saxon Creek is located 0.5 miles to the south. Specifically the APE is a low alluvial terrace and tailings' platform. The lower Saxon Creek area, in the vicinity of the APE, contains a gray pine-black oak-ponderosa pine woodland. Understory plants include poison oak, buckeye, and toyon. A nonnative invasive species, Himalayan blackberry, was abundant on the terrace along Saxon Creek and, in fact, covered the stampmill parts until the Telegraph Fire of 2008 burned over it. The wildlife in the area is typical for the central Sierra Nevada foothills. The APE is within BLM's Limestone Salamander Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The APE is just outside of the Merced Wild and Scenic River corridor.

The area's cultural resource sensitivity is moderate; the terrain is relatively steep and rocky but there are flats and perennial water sources along lower Saxon Creek within the Merced River canyon. Prehistoric resources (i.e., bedrock mortars, lithic scatters, isolated lithics) occur in the general area, though none have been found specifically within the APE. No modern Native American issues are anticipated.

Of note, the APE is the location of the Live Oak/Yellow Metals/Dos Pinos/Aprils Fool gold mine. There are references to the mine in State Mining Bureau/Division of Mines reports predating World War II. The first documented reference dates to the 1913-14 reporting period, when the mine was called the Live Oak and was owned by George Trede. A change in name and ownership is reflected in the next reference: Yellow Metal Mine owned by the Yellow Metal Mining Company of Emeryville with Richard Jeffery operating the mine. The only physical change in the property was the installation of a new Hendy 2-stamp mill, through which some ore was run. The names Dos Pinos and Aprils Fool were given to the mine by modern mining claimants. In 1998, BLM determined that the cabin that stood at the site was not historically significant. BLM removed it in 2004.

The level of recreational use of BLM-administered land in the vicinity is considered to be low. The area is accessible off of Rancheria Creek Road but is behind a locked gate. The area may see occasional hunting and hiking use. BLM manages this area in accordance with class III visual resource management (VRM) standards. BLM's objective for class III is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

## **4.0 Environmental Effects**

The following critical elements have been considered for this environmental assessment, and unless specifically mentioned later in this EA, have been determined to be unaffected by the proposal: prime/unique farmlands, floodplains, hazardous waste, wetlands and riparian zones, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, and environmental justice.

### **4.1 Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives**

The proposed action would have negligible short-term impacts on air, water, and soil resources. Dragging the stampmill parts across the ground, as proposed, would cause some temporary dust and minor ground disturbance. There would be no impacts to the bed of Saxon Creek. The proposed action would not cause long-term erosion issues.

The BLM botanist analyzed the impacts of removing the stampmill parts on botanical resources. The study was designed to help BLM meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act and other BLM policy. He did not find any special status plants affected by the proposed action. A BLM biologist examined the area in spring 2003 in advance of BLM's cabin removal project and did not find any special status species at the site (see attached study). The area of potential effects—the alluvial terrace along Saxon Creek—was nearly covered with Himalayan blackberry until it was burned over during the Telegraph Fire in summer 2008. The BLM botanist recommends that the proposed action would not affect threatened and endangered plants or other BLM special status plants.

The BLM wildlife biologist analyzed the impacts of the proposed action on wildlife, especially on special status wildlife. Her analysis was designed to help BLM meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act and other BLM policy. The biologist recommends that the proposed action would not negatively affect the limestone salamander or its habitat. The ACEC values would not be harmed. There would be no impacts to threatened and endangered wildlife or other BLM special status wildlife.

The BLM archaeologist conducted a cultural resource study of the project area to determine whether significant cultural resources would be affected by the proposed action. The study was designed to help BLM meet its obligations under Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act and other BLM policy. The BLM archaeologist found that no significant cultural resources would be affected by the proposed action. BLM determined that the cabin that stood at the site was not historically significant. The California State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with this determination and BLM removed the cabin in 2004. After further review of the site, the BLM archaeological recommends that the stampmill parts are also not significant (refer to the study attached by the BLM archaeologist for more information).

It is highly unlikely that any places of traditional religious and cultural significance to living Native Americans would be affected.

The proposed action would not affect recreational use in any way. Recreational use is uncommon in the area affected by the proposed action.

The proposed project would not affect visual resources. BLM manages the area in accordance with VRM class III standards, and the proposed action is in line with the management objective for this class, which is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape.

The proposed action would have a long-term beneficial social impact. Tourists and members of the community would be able to see the stampmill on display at the Museum grounds in Mariposa and learn about the gold mining history of the Merced River canyon.

#### **4.2 Impacts of the No Action Alternative**

Under the no action alternative, there would not be impacts to environmental resources. The current condition would remain the same. However, there could be a long-term negative social impact. Tourists and most members of the local community would not be able to see the stampmill on display at the Museum grounds and learn more about the gold mining history of the Merced River canyon.

#### **4.3 Cumulative Impacts**

There would be no negative cumulative impacts. The stampmill parts are not considered to be historically significant.

### **5.0 Agencies and Persons Consulted**

No agencies or persons outside of BLM were consulted other than the Ron Loya with the Museum.

#### **5.1 BLM Interdisciplinary Team**

*/s/ James Barnes*

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NEPA coordinator/Cultural Resources

*/s/ Albert Franklin*

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Botany

*/s/ Peggy Cranston*

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Wildlife

#### **5.2 Availability of Document and Comment Procedures**

This EA, posted on Mother Lode Field Office's website ([www.blm.gov/ca/folsom](http://www.blm.gov/ca/folsom)) under Information, NEPA (or available upon request), will be available for a 15-day public review period. Comments should be sent to the Mother Lode Field Office, 5152 Hillside Circle, El Dorado Hills, CA 95762 or emailed to us at [ca180@ca.blm.gov](mailto:ca180@ca.blm.gov).