

RECREATIONAL GOLD PROSPECTING ON PUBLIC LAND

Recreational mining and panning is allowed on "open" federal land. Many of the good gold-bearing placer streams are patented, and as such, are private land not open to public use. Of the public lands that are open to mining, some 17,000 unpatented mining claims are in existence. The mining claim provides the right of the claimant to search for and develop minerals. The recreational miner or panner should not go onto another person's claim for prospecting or panning without the claimant's permission.

Our office does not have any areas of public lands designated specifically for recreational use within our administrative area. Nor do we maintain a listing of federal lands that are open and available for claiming or recreational use. You will need to identify a specific area of interest and then determine if the area is open to mineral entry and location. Refer to our [map index](#) for the surface/mineral management quads. These maps reflect the ownership of surface and mineral estates. The information was correct at the time each map was printed; however, we suggest you verify the current status once you have determined a specific area of interest. You will need to confirm if the minerals are still federally owned and if the area is open to mineral entry and location. Our office can provide this information, but you will first need to provide us with the legal land description (township, range, section and quadrant of section).

Once you have determined that an area of federal minerals is open to [mineral entry and location](#), you will need to determine if the area already has existing claims. You may request a computer generated report of the area you wish to enter. The report should contain any active mining claims located within the specific township, range, section, and quarter section. Additional information on the report should include claimant name, claim name, the BLM assigned serial number, date of location, and the lead file serial number.

You may request copies of the certificates of location and/or the location maps, which are submitted by the claimant, by providing us with the lead file serial number that is listed on the report.

Federal regulations require payment in advance for copies from our records. We have provided a [price list](#) of our current copy work charges. As it is not advisable to mail cash, please remit your payment in the form of check or money order made payable to Department of the Interior - BLM. Our office also accepts payment by Visa and MasterCard.

A recreational miner with a pick, shovel or gold pan does not need a special permit on BLM land in Montana. A person using a suction dredge in Montana should get a [permit](#) from the [Water Protection Bureau](#), Department of Environmental Quality, 1520 East Sixth Ave. PO Box 200901, Helena, Montana 59620-0901, phone 406 444-3080. If the suction dredge intake is less than 4 inches in diameter, a general permit is required. If the dredge intake is larger than 4 inches, a more complicated permit is required for which there is a significant charge. The [Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation](#) and the [US Army Corps of Engineers](#) may also require permits for suction dredging.

To encourage better mining methods, the Montana Bureau of Mines & Geology has recently published Special Publication 106, which describes Montana Placer Mining's Best Management Practices. You may also contact the [Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology](#) for information on Montana's state regulations and laws. Their office may also be able to provide you with more specific information on gold panning and recreational use. To contact the Montana Bureau of Mines & Geology, write Montana Tech, Butte, Montana 59701, or phone 406 496-4167.