Finding of No Significant Impact

Sandman Exploration Project
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-NV-WO10-2010-0005-EA

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Based on the interdisciplinary analysis conducted in the Sandman Exploration Project Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-WO10-2010-005-EA dated May 2010, a review of the exploration plan of operations, and my consideration of the Council of Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts, I have determined that the impacts associated with the proposed action are not significant. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) pursuant to Section 102(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is not required.

I have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the approved Paradise-Denio Management Framework Plan and is consistent with the plans and policies of neighboring local, county, tribal, state and federal governments to the greatest extent practical.

Context

Newmont Mining Corporation (NMC) submitted a Plan of Operations (PoO) to expand their existing notice-level and state reclamation permit activities located about 14 miles west to northwest of Winnemucca, in Humboldt County, Nevada. The project would be located on lands of the National System of Public Lands (public lands) administered by the BLM, and on private lands in part or all of Township 37 North, Range 35 East (T37N, R35E), sections 11-15, 22-26, and 36; T37N, R36E, sections 7, 18-20, 22, and 27-33; T36N, R35E, sections 12, 23, and 24; and T36N, R36E, sections 4-9, 13, 17-24, 26, 27, 29, and 30, Mount Diablo Baseline and Meridian, and would disturb a total of 441.2 acres (in addition to the 58.2 acres already disturbed under their current notices and state reclamation activities). They propose to continue their exploration activities by constructing drill sites and sumps, excavating trenches for bulk sampling, and installing monitoring wells. These sites would be accessed by utilizing existing roads, overland travel and constructing new roads when necessary. The project is planned to run for approximately 5 years.

Intensity

1) *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*
The EA considered possible beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed exploration project. Benefits to the local communities through the use of local retail services, restaurants and lodging are possible throughout the approximate five years of the project. Any adverse impacts would be classified as temporary as well, since they would either end, or through reclamation be wholly or partially mitigated after exploration has ceased. Upon completion of the exploration activities, all

equipment would be removed, and surface disturbances would be recontoured and revegetated. There are no long-term impacts to the area anticipated from the exploration activities.

2) *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*
Exploration activities are not expected to cause adverse public health effects. The proposed action includes observing prudent vehicle speeds and minimizing dust created by vehicle traffic and construction activities. Safety requirements would be required by MSHA (Mine Safety and Health Administration) and the Nevada Industrial Relations Division of Mine Safety. No long term adverse public health or safety affects are expected from use of the reclaimed area.

3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*
The project would not affect park lands, prime farmland, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas. All areas to be disturbed by exploration activity have been surveyed and evaluated for historic and/or cultural resources.

4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*
Exploration drilling projects have a long history in Nevada. Very few public comments were received through scoping or the public comment period on the preliminary EA. There were no comments that were controversial in nature. Through the environmental measures committed to by NMC and the reclamation required at the completion of the project, any effects to the human environment would be minor and temporary in nature.

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the environment are likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*
The exploration techniques are all common methods employed in the mining industry and are not expected to produce uncertain or unique risks.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*
Approval of the proposed action would not set any known precedents or establish any principles for future decisions. The proposed exploration activities have been commonly applied for several decades.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*
Cumulative impacts to the area were assessed in the EA. Three separate Cumulative Effects Study Areas (CESA) were used for the analysis. An Air Quality CESA was developed to address potential cumulative impacts to air quality, a Natural Resources CESA was developed to assess potential cumulative impacts to water quality, soils, vegetation, wildlife, invasive, nonnative species, migratory birds and special status species, and a Traffic CESA was developed to address potential cumulative impacts to public safety. Detailed analyses of these areas were done to assess the potential cumulative impacts. Through these analyses it was determined that no significant cumulative impacts would result from the proposed action.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.*
The proposed action would have no adverse affects to any of these resources, since NMC would avoid, or mitigate impacts to all eligible or the contributing element portions of cultural resources within the Project Area. Eligible or contributing elements of an eligible site would be avoided by a buffer zone of 100 feet. In cases of historic roads the non-contributing elements would continue to be utilized and the contributing elements would not be utilized for transportation. The contributing elements would continue to be avoided by the 100 feet buffer zone during all other activities. If eligible or the contributing elements to an eligible site could not be avoided the site would be mitigated through a data recovery plan approved by the BLM in consultation with the SHPO.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under ESA of 1973.*
These issues were examined in the EA and no adverse impacts were identified.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*
No threats of violation were identified in the preparation of the EA and any Decision regarding this proposed project would stipulate that the operator must obtain all necessary approvals from other federal, state, and local agencies before proceeding with the proposed action. The BLM would make at least two inspections each year to ensure compliance with the approved plan of operations. Additionally, the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection would make regular inspections pertaining to the reclamation permit.

Mandy L DeForest
for **Michael Truden, Field Manager,**
Humboldt River Field Office

4/30/10
Date