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Toiyabe National Forest
Austin Ranger District
Box 130, Austin, NV 89310

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Item

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AUG 04 1994

August 3, 1994

DEPT. OF ADMINISTRATION
DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

State of Nevada
Dept of Administration
Attn: State Clearinghouse
Capitol Complex
Carson City, NV 89710

Dear Sir or Madam:

The Austin Ranger District is currently assessing Santa Fe Pacific Gold Corporation's Plan of Operations #03-94-009 to ensure that it complies with the standards and guidelines in the Toiyabe National Forest's Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). The Ione Buffalo Canyon Project for 1994 and 1995 is located in the Shoshone Mountain Range, approximately 55 miles southwest of Austin, NV, in Section 21, T. 12 N., R. 39 E. Maximum area of disturbance as proposed by Santa Fe Pacific would be about 13 acres.

The Forest Service encourages you to assist in the environmental analysis process by providing written comments on your concerns that pertain to the resource management of this area. Comments should be received by the Austin District Ranger by September 9, 1994, at the following address: DAYLE R. FLANIGAN, Austin Ranger District, Toiyabe National Forest, P.O. Box 130, Austin, NV 89310.

Proposed Action

Santa Fe Pacific Gold proposes to conduct exploration drilling of up to 50 holes, accessed by a maximum of 20,000 feet of new road and cross country travel in the Buffalo Canyon area, 4 miles south of Ione and 1 mile north of Berlin-Icthyosaur State Park, on the west slope of the Shoshone Mountain Range. Existing roads provide general access to the area. Drilling would be conducted by a tire mounted or track mounted reverse circulation drill rig. Santa Fe Pacific is proposing this work as a multi-year approach to the subsurface minerals exploration of the area, to be phased each year. A maximum of 8,000 feet of road construction and 20 drill holes would be done the first year, with more (if needed) in the following year or two.

Mitigation measures outlined in the proposal consist of using cross-country travel where possible to minimize surface disturbance. Portable containers or a mud sump would be used to contain drill fluids. Tree cutting, if any, would be kept to a minimum. Removed trees would be cut to ground level, bucked and scattered. Water cross-drains would be constructed on roads to prevent channeling of water runoff.

Reclamation measures outlined in the proposal are as follows: Drill holes would be plugged in compliance with State Regulations. Proposed seasonal reclamation includes installation of drainage structures and seeding disturbed areas as an interim measure. As final reclamation, disturbed pad and road areas would be reshaped to natural contour and reseeded. Existing roads not designated by the Forest Service to remain open would be closed with cross-drains constructed to prevent channeling of water runoff.

Preliminary Issues and Concerns

The following issues or concerns have been identified during the preliminary review of this project:

1. Erosion Control: New road construction may increase erosion.
2. Cultural Resources: The project area is near the historic mining area of Berlin, and prehistoric and historic sites may be present. Santa Fe Pacific Gold will be contracting with a consultant to complete an intensive cultural resources survey of the area.
3. Visuals: The area of the proposed work is on a bench area on the lower slope of the range front, and any construction will be visible from Ione Valley.

Forest Plan Compliance

Forest Management Direction includes the following standards and guidelines:

- 1) Visual Quality Objectives:
Partial Retention - management practices are visually subordinate to the existing area.
- 2) Recreation Opportunity Spectrum:
Semi-Primitive Motorized - projects should be conducted as such to let the area remain natural or natural appearing within a motorized area.
- 3) Minerals Goals:
Mineral exploration and development will be encouraged while establishing reclamation policies that minimize or shorten the duration of impacts on renewable and non-renewable surface resources.
- 4) Minerals Desired Future Condition:
Any operation with potential to cause significant surface disturbance will be covered by an operation plan with provisions to minimize or mitigate effects on natural and cultural resource values. Reclamation plans will address surface disturbance and will contain provisions to return disturbed areas to as near the pre-existing condition as possible. Reclamation bonds will be calculated in accordance with the reclamation plan.
- 5) Minerals Standards and Guidelines:
The standards and guidelines set forth in paragraphs 1 thru 24 on pages IV-57 thru IV-59 of the Forest Plan. The Shoshone Mountain Range falls within Management Area #7. Total management area direction and proposed management practices are found on pages IV-120 thru IV-122 of the Forest Plan.

Preliminary Alternatives

- 1) No Action. No exploration would be conducted, no holes would be drilled and no new roads would be constructed.
- 2) Proposed Action. Approval of Plan of Operations #03-94-009, as submitted, would be granted.
- 3) Proposed Action With Modifications. Approval of Plan of Operations #03-94-009, modified to address issues and concerns that are identified. An example of this would be to approve a drilling program but to restrict the amount of road construction allowed to accommodate cultural resources or visual concerns. Another alternative would be to only consider work proposed for this year, rather than to also consider potential further exploration for 1995 or beyond.

Again, your comments on this project are welcome. Please contact Wayne Frye (702) 964-2671 for any additional information or questions you might have.

Sincerely,

Wayne H. Frye

for DAYLE R. FLANIGAN
District Ranger