



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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**Palmer Exploration Project, Constantine North, Inc.
Mine Plan of Operations**
Environmental Assessment, DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2016-0006-EA

Case File, AA-094088

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Background

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) (DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2016-0006-EA) analyzing the effects of Constantine Metal Inc.'s (Constantine) proposed Mine Plan of Operations, which includes an expansion of existing Notice-level exploration activity along Glacier Creek in the Glacier Creek Mining District, Alaska. Constantine is currently conducting exploration activities on 111 federal claims under a Notice of Exploration acknowledged by the BLM in 2014.

Constantine's new mine plan of operations (plan) would expand their existing exploration activities beyond the 5 acres of ground disturbance previously authorized by BLM. Specifically, the plan proposes up to 2.5 miles of additional road construction and includes the installation of culverts and bridges over gullies and streams in the vicinity of Glacier Creek. It also includes a switchback road with rock fall berms and an area at the terminus of the switchback road to stage equipment and facilities such as temporary work trailers, storage containers, and a portable toilet facility. The proposed road would provide access for up to 40 new exploration drill sites. These drill sites are all planned to occur east of their current mineral exploration areas and would provide a staging area for helicopter and ground-supported exploration activities. Constantine plans to continue in the exploration phase of their project for the next 5 – 10 years; the applicant intends to start operating in the new plan (if approved) in 2016.

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) has been prepared for Alternative 2, the Proposed Action Alternative.

Finding of No Significant Impact

This action and its effects have been evaluated consistent with the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for determining *significance*. Per 40 CFR § 1508.27, a determination of *significance* requires consideration of both context and intensity. The former refers to the relative context in which the action would occur such as society as a whole, affected region, affected interests, etc. The latter refers to the severity of the impact.

Context

This project is located within the Glacier Creek Mining District in south central Alaska. This area has had early interest in mineral mining since the 1930's. The current activities are under a Notice-level exploration in which the operator is allowed to have up to 5 acres of disturbance at any one time under the current 2014 Notice of Exploration. Constantine Metal, Inc. is the largest operator in the District and has been regularly reclaiming drilling pads after they have ended their useful life.

Intensity

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The EA considered and disclosed potential beneficial and adverse effects of the Proposed Action Alternative. For example, the EA discloses that activities associated with exploration would displace wildlife within the affected area during the operating season. The EA also demonstrates that this loss of habitat is not expected to cause a negative effect on the population level to the wildlife in the area (EA, section 3.5 Wildlife).

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.

Design Features for the activity include Federal and State requirements for the safe handling and disposal of human waste, hazardous materials, and storm water pollution (EA, Section 2.2 Alternative 2 – Proposed Action Alternative). Additionally, the access road to the active exploration area is required to be labeled and clearly identified for safety reasons to prevent unnecessary entry, as required by the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) and in accordance with 43 CFR § 3809.420(b)(13). Therefore, given implementation of Design Features, the degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety will be minimal and does not rise to a level of significance to warrant further analysis.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity of historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

No park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas are present at the project site. A 2014 visit to the site located no intact cultural resources (EA, section 1.7 Issues Eliminated from Further Analysis). Additionally, Design Features are included in the EA for the protection of any cultural resources discovered during the course of exploration activities (EA, section 2.2.11.3 Cultural and Paleontological Resources).

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The anticipated effects of the Proposed Action Alternative are similar to many other BLM authorized hard rock exploration operations. The project area has been mined since the 1930s. There is controversy over the effects to mountain goat summer habitat and salmon in the Proposed Action Alternative. However, the operating season for the exploratory work will cease

in the winter and minor impacts to Glacier Creek are anticipated, relative to the entire drainage, and does not rise to a level of significance that would require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement.

5. *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

Hard rock exploration is common to BLM-managed lands nationally as well as in Alaska, and has been occurring in Glacier Creek project area since the 1930s. There is neither uncertainty nor unknown risk associated with the requested use, particularly at this scale.

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.*

The proposed activity is consistent with allowable uses under the Ring of Fire Resource Management Plan Record of Decision and Approved Plan of 2008, (EA, section 1.4 Land Use Plan Conformance). This Proposed Action Alternative neither establishes a precedent nor represents a decision in principle about future actions. Furthermore, the exploration notice activities would be inspected annually for consistency, which would allow the approved activities to continue within the scope of the EA and Plan of Operations.

7. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

Overall, the potential cumulative effects resulting from the Proposed Action Alternative are limited. The requested use would impact up to 40 acres. However, the operator is required to follow best management practices, regulations, *Design Features and Mitigation Measures*, as well as standard operating procedures, stipulations, and perform required reclamation to mitigate these impacts. (EA, Section 2.2 Alternative 2 – Proposed Action Alternative)

8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.*

As stated for intensity factor #3 above, the Proposed Action Alternative would have no known effects on cultural resources (EA, section 2.2.11.3 Cultural and Paleontological Resources)

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 the Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

Based on currently available information, the Proposed Action Alternative would not affect any threatened or endangered species or their habitats, therefore no consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considered necessary pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (EA, section 1.7 Issues Eliminated from Further Analysis).

10. *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

Based on the environmental analysis, the Proposed Action Alternative does not threaten to violate Federal, State or local law or requirements (EA, section 1.5 Other Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Policies).

Conclusion

Therefore, on the basis of the information contained in the EA (DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2016-0006-EA), and all other information available to me, it is my determination that:

1. The environmental effects identified for the Proposed Action Alternative do not meet the definition of significance as defined by context and intensity considerations at 40 CFR § 1508.27;
2. The Proposed Action Alternative is in conformance with the ROD for the Ring of Fire RMP/ROD (2008); and
3. The Proposed Action Alternative does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment.

Therefore, neither an Environmental Impact Statement nor a supplement to the existing EA is necessary and neither will be prepared.

\s\ Dennis C. Teitzel

8/18/2016

Dennis C. Teitzel
Glennallen Field Manager

Date

Attachments

1. BLM 2016: *Constantine Metals Environmental Assessment*, DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2016-0006-EA