

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

DOI-BLM-CA-D050-2017-0037-EA

For the
Perdito Exploration Project

Introduction:

The Bureau of Land Management has conducted an environmental assessment (DOI-BLM-CA-D050-2017-0037-EA) to analyze the potential effect(s) of authorizing Silver Standard U.S. Holdings Inc. (a holding company of SSR Mining Inc.) to drill & sample unpatented lode claims on public land at Conglomerate Mesa, in the southern Inyo Mountains within Inyo County, California. The proposed action includes authorizing a drilling rig to access seven specific locations identified by the proponent. Two of the seven locations are within the Cerro Gordo-Conglomerate Mesa Area of Critical Environmental Concern and all seven are within lands designated as California Desert National Conservation Lands.

Plan Conformance and Consistency:

The proposed authorization is consistent with the California Desert Conservation Area Management Plan of 1980¹ (CDCA Plan) and its amendment, the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan² because:

- The involved lands are not, and are not proposed to be withdrawn from operation of the Mining Law of 1872 (Federal Register 83 FR 5459).
- Drill Holes 1 & 2 are within the Cerro Gordo-Conglomerate Mesa Area of Critical Environmental Concern,³ requiring an authorized plan for those exploration sites subject to 43 CFR 3809.11(c)(3).
- Section II.5.1 of the DRECP Land Use Plan Amendment eliminates all multiple-use classes in the California Desert Conservation Area. However, Section II.4.2.4.5 of the DRECP Land Use Plan Amendment informs me that “For the purposes of locatable minerals, California Desert National Conservation Lands are treated as ‘controlled’ or ‘limited’ use areas in the CDCA, requiring a Plan of Operations for greater than casual use under 43 CFR 3809.11.”⁴

¹ Available at CDCA Plan (https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/projects/lup/66949/82080/96344/CDCA_Plan.pdf)

² Available at DRECP (<http://drecep.org/finaldrecep/>)

³ Available at Final DRECP (http://drecep.org/finaldrecep/lupa/Appendix_B/)

⁴ Available at DRECP LUPA (http://www.drecep.org/finaldrecep/lupa/DRECP_BLM_LUPA.pdf)

Finding of No Significant Impact:

Based on a review of the Environmental Assessment and supporting referenced documents, I have determined the project is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27 and none exceed those effects as described in the California Desert Conservation Area Management Plan of 1980, as amended. An environmental impact statement is not required and will not be prepared.

Significance as used in 40 CFR 1508.27 requires consideration of both *context* and *intensity*.

Context:

This project is localized with implications only for the immediate area. The impacts associated with this project are short-term and local, and are not likely in and of itself to have international, national, regional or state-wide impacts. Silver Standard U.S. Holdings Inc. requests BLM authorization to drill seven locations on public lands within the Inyo Mountains of Inyo County, California. Two of the seven locations are within the Cerro Gordo-Conglomerate Mesa Area of Critical Environmental Concern and all seven are within lands designated as California Desert National Conservation Lands. This authorization allows Silver Standard to drill, gather subsurface data and samples, plug and reclaim the affected sites.

Intensity:

Intensity refers to the severity of impact. The ten NEPA criteria for evaluating intensity include:

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse.

- The proposed action may have temporary or minor effect to resources as described in the Environmental Assessment. The proponent has incorporated measures to reduce or mitigate impacts into the proposed action, with further stipulations recommended by BLM in Chapter 4 (Environment Impact Analysis).
- Drilling is the best method to obtain direct, observable baseline samples for subsurface mineral resources, conditions, materials and geology.

2. The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety.

- Off-highway vehicle route S2978 (the public travel route nearest the area) may have some increased traffic incident with this project. The amount of traffic should not affect the health or safety of the general public.

- 3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.**
 - The action has no effect to any prime farm land, wetland, wilderness, wild/scenic rivers, or designated critical habitat for any species listed as endangered or threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act.
 - A class III cultural survey was completed for the project in accordance with Conservation Management Action CMA-LUPA-CUL-4. No direct, indirect or measurable cumulative effects to cultural resources were identified for any alternative.
- 4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.**
 - BLM received a large number of comments expressing opposition to the project and stating the area should be left alone. "Highly controversial" in the context of 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (4) refers to substantial disagreement within the scientific community about the environmental effects of the proposed action. It does not refer to expressions of opposition, or support, or to differences of opinion concerning how public lands should be managed. No substantial disagreements within the scientific community were identified through the EA analysis or public comment.
- 5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.**
 - The proposed drilling program is not unique or unusual. The effects to the human environment are fully analyzed and disclosed in this environmental assessment. No unique or unknown risks are identified by this assessment.
 - The likely effects of the proposed action to air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, soil, water, wildlife, heritage resources, Native American values, recreation, visual resources, and range are adequately disclosed in the Environmental Analysis chapter of this EA. No unique, unusual or unknown risks to these resources are identified by this assessment.
- 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.**
 - Drilling will provide further useful baseline data on subsurface resources. Such data may prove useful for planning future management of mineral and other natural resources.
 - NEPA limits consideration to future actions that are reasonably foreseeable, not merely possible or conceivable. Reasonably foreseeable actions are those for which there are existing decisions, funding, formal proposals, or are highly probable based on known opportunities or trends, but not mere speculation. The approval of this

exploration project involves no precedent or decision in principle regarding the value, validity or likelihood of development for these lode claims. Any future development or mining operations will be subject to appropriate NEPA analysis before authorization, and approval of this action does not represent a decision in principle for future activities.

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

- The assessment discloses there will be negligible cumulative impacts to any resource analyzed in the cumulative effects study area.
- NEPA standard 40 CFR 1508.27(a) provides that in the case of a site-specific action significance usually depends upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other 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 historical resources.

- The area of potential effect has been surveyed and assessed in keeping with the Statewide Heritage Protocol Agreement of February 2014. No adverse effect is expected from this action, and all necessary steps have been taken to identify, record and determine effects on cultural resources with the area of potential effect. BLM is in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- Appendix A (Interdisciplinary Team Analysis Record) of the assessment discloses that paleontological resources may possibly be present in the area, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required. The area of potential effect is not known to contain any paleontological resources prohibited from casual collection under 43 CFR 8365.1-5(b) (2), or sensitive enough to require a collection permit by the Paleontological Resources Preservation Act (16 USC 470aaa).

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,

- The area is not within designated critical habitat for any species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Drill sites and any incident disturbance will be reclaimed, leaving no long-term measurable impact to habitat for any threatened or special status species.
- Human presence and noise may temporarily disturb members of some species on BLM's sensitive species list while the operation is in progress. All drilling alternatives contain measures to mitigate effects of the project to sensitive species. A biological monitor will be onsite during construction, and all drill sites and incident

disturbance will be reclaimed. No long-term measurable impact is expected for any species on BLM's sensitive species list.

10. Whether the action threatens violation of a federal, state, local, or tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment.

- All operations authorized by Surface Management regulations, including this proposal, are required to be conducted in a manner that complies with pertinent Federal and state laws (43 CFR 3809.420(a)(6)). The proposed action (approval to drill seven sites) does not violate any federal, state, local, or tribal laws, regulation or policy imposed for protection of the environment.



Carl Symons
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5/16/2018

Date