

6. Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment:
(include agencies with overlapping jurisdiction)

Montana Natural Heritage Program
Montana Historic Preservation Office
Montana Department of Fish Wildlife & Parks (MFWP)
Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)

Species Impact Information
Cultural Resource Inventory
Dewatered Stream Information
TMDL listings

Part II. Environmental Review

1. Environmental Impact Checklist:

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY AND DISTRIBUTION

Water quantity - Assess whether the source of supply is identified as a chronically or periodically dewatered stream by DFWP. Assess whether the proposed use will worsen the already dewatered condition.

Determination: Iron Creek is not listed as chronically or periodically dewatered. There will be impacts on the source from this proposed use, but those impacts are not expected to be significant.

Water quality - Assess whether the stream is listed as water quality impaired or threatened by DEQ, and whether the proposed project will affect water quality.

Determination: The proposed use should have no significant impact on water quality issues in the area.

Groundwater - Assess if the proposed project impacts ground water quality or supply. If this is a groundwater appropriation, assess if it could impact adjacent surface water flows.

Determination: This proposed use of water should have no significant impact on groundwater quality or quantity in the area. All exploratory drilling should be done according to accepted practices.

DIVERSION WORKS - Assess whether the means of diversion, construction and operation of the appropriation works of the proposed project will impact any of the following: channel impacts, flow modifications, barriers, riparian areas, dams, well construction.

Determination: The diversion works will include a 5 hp pump and one inch pipe system temporarily placed in the stream, gravity flow will be utilized when possible. There will be minor impacts from the proposed diversion and operation, however those impacts are not expected to be significant or long lasting.

UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Endangered and threatened species - Assess whether the proposed project will impact any threatened or endangered fish, wildlife, plants or aquatic species or any “species of special concern,” or create a barrier to the migration or movement of fish or wildlife. For groundwater, assess whether the proposed project, including impacts on adjacent surface flows, would impact any threatened or endangered species or “species of special concern.”

Determination: The Montana Natural Heritage Program has identified the Canada Lynx, the Grizzly Bear, the Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout and the Dense-Leaf Draba as threatened or endangered species in this project area.

Species	State Ranking Codes	Forest Service Status
Canada Lynx	S3	Threatened
Grizzly Bear	S2-S3	Threatened
Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout	S2	Sensitive
Dense Leaf Draba (vascular plant)	S2	Not Listed

S2 At risk because of very limited and potentially declining numbers, extent and/or habitat, making it vulnerable to global extinction or extirpation in the state.

S3 Potentially at risk because of limited and potentially declining numbers, extent and/or habitat, even though it may be abundant in some areas.

Threatened

Any species likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range (16 U.S.C. 1532(20)).

Sensitive

Any species for which the Regional Forester has determined there is a concern for population viability within the state, as evidenced by a significant current or predicted downward trend in populations or habitat.

The noise and commotion of this project may have some impact on these habitats. Extreme care should be taken and close coordination with the Forest Service throughout the project is essential to minimize habitat disturbance.

Wetlands - Consult and assess whether the apparent wetland is a functional wetland (according to COE definitions), and whether the wetland resource would be impacted.

Determination: The project area is not within a wetland, so there should be no significant impacts to wetlands from this proposed use.

Ponds - For ponds, consult and assess whether existing wildlife, waterfowl, or fisheries resources would be impacted.

Determination: Small ponds, depressions and unnamed tributaries to Iron Creek will be used as the source for this project. The applicant has done a site inspection in early summer and late

summer and asserts that the depressions have water physically available in the early summer because of snow melt and naturally dry up by late summer. There is not expected to be significant impacts to wildlife, waterfowl or fisheries due to this use of water.

GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE - *Assess whether there will be degradation of soil quality, alteration of soil stability, or moisture content. Assess whether the soils are heavy in salts that could cause saline seep.*

Determination: There is not expected to be degradation soil quality, alteration of soil stability or saline seep problems as a result of this use of water.

VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS - *Assess impacts to existing vegetative cover. Assess whether the proposed project would result in the establishment or spread of noxious weeds.*

Determination: There will be impacts on existing vegetation due to this project. The project also has the potential to spread noxious weeds with the equipment that will be used. The applicant is expected to take an active roll in erosion control and suppressing the spread of noxious weeds. It's expected that the applicant will work closely with the Forest Service to ensure the project is using the appropriated procedures to minimize these impacts.

AIR QUALITY - *Assess whether there will be a deterioration of air quality or adverse effects on vegetation due to increased air pollutants.*

Determination: There is not expected to be any significant impacts on air quality due to this project.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES - *Assess whether there will be degradation of unique archeological or historical sites in the vicinity of the proposed project.*

Determination: The State Historic Preservation Office conducted a cultural resource file search for this site and found that there are no recorded sites within the project area. This absence of recorded cultural properties does not mean that one does not exist but rather reflects the absence of a previous cultural resource inventory in this area. The State Historic Preservation Office feels that this project has a low likelihood of impacting cultural properties. However, if cultural materials be discovered it will be the responsibility of the applicant to contact the State Historic Preservation Office to have the site investigated.

DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY - *Assess any other impacts on environmental resources of land, water and energy not already addressed.*

Determination: Exploratory drilling will impact the primitive nature of this region, like any industrial use or development; more traffic will result in changes in existing land use.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS - *Assess whether the proposed project is inconsistent with any locally adopted environmental plans and goals.*

Determination: The proposed project is not inconsistent with locally adopted environmental plans or goals. The US Forest Service will ultimately be responsible that the project complies with the environmental standards established for the Custer National Forest.

ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES - *Assess whether the proposed project will impact access to or the quality of recreational and wilderness activities.*

Determination: This project may be unsightly and noisy to recreational users of the Custer National Forest. Other than the noise and unsightly equipment there should be few impacts on recreational or wilderness activities from this proposed activity.

HUMAN HEALTH - *Assess whether the proposed project impacts on human health.*

Determination: There should be no significant impact on human health from this proposed use.

PRIVATE PROPERTY - *Assess whether there are any government regulatory impacts on private property rights.*

Yes ___ No X *If yes, analyze any alternatives considered that could reduce, minimize, or eliminate the regulation of private property rights.*

Determination: The proposed project is in the Custer National Forest and should not impact private property.

OTHER HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES - *For routine actions of limited environmental impact, the following may be addressed in a checklist fashion.*

Impacts on:

- (a) Cultural uniqueness and diversity? No significant impact
- (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? No significant impact
- (c) Existing land uses? No significant impact
- (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? No significant impact
- (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? No significant impact
- (f) Demands for government services? No significant impact

- (g) Industrial and commercial activity? No significant impact
- (h) Utilities? No significant impact
- (i) Transportation? No significant impact
- (j) Safety? No significant impact
- (k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? No significant impact

2. *Secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical environment and human population:*

Secondary Impacts: The proposed project will occur during the peak recreation period for this part of the Custer National Forest. Every industrial activity that takes place on pristine land encourages an expectation that a similar or more extensive use of that land will be acceptable in the future. Continuous industrial activity on public lands also has a long term affect of diminishing the community perception of the natural landscape.

Cumulative Impacts: This water use is expected to have little negative impact on water users down stream.

- 3. *Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures:*** The applicant is aware that he would be required to cease using water if the use of the water is adversely impacting the rights of downstream users.
- 4. *Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives to the proposed action, including the no action alternative, if an alternative is reasonably available and prudent to consider:*** The proposed activity is reasonable, and is well within accepted practices for mineral exploration.

The no action alternative may force Beartooth Platinum Corporation to truck the water they need for this activity on to the site. This would require more traffic, more vehicles, and equipment that may create more impacts on the environment.

PART III. Conclusion

- 1. *Preferred Alternative:*** To issue the temporary permit and to encourage the applicant to make every reasonable conservation effort to minimize impacts.
- 2. *Comments and Responses:*** None to report.
- 3. *Finding:***
 Yes ___ No X *Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?*

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action: No significant environmental impacts were identified. No EIS is required.

Name of person(s) responsible for preparation of EA:

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