

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation  
Water Resources Division  
Water Rights Bureau

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**  
**For Routine Actions with Limited Environmental Impact**

**Part I. Proposed Action Description**

1. *Applicant/Contact name and address:* North American Silver, 609 Bank St., Wallace ID 83873
2. *Type of action:* Application for a Temporary Water Use Permit 30017383-76N
3. *Water source name:* Snake Creek, tributary to the East Fork of the Bull River.
4. *Location affected by action:* W2 of section 5, T 27N R 32W, Sanders County
5. *Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and benefits:*  
The DNRC shall issue a water use permit if an applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-311, MCA are met. The applicant is seeking a temporary permit to divert water from Snake Creek at a rate of 8 gpm for mining exploration from May 15 to October 15. If issued, this permit will sunset on 10/16/2007. The water will be diverted with a siphoning pipeline and used only for cooling drilling bits during exploratory drilling.
6. *Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment:*  
(include agencies with overlapping jurisdiction) MT Dept of FW & P, MT Natural Heritage Program, State Historic Preservation Office and the MT DEQ.

**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: Snake Creek is so small it is not even listed on the MT FW & P website. It is doubtful the loss of the requested 8 gpm could even be measured at the confluence with the East Fork of the Bull River.*

**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: No adverse impacts are anticipated by the diversion of this water.*

**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: No impacts are expected.*

**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 applicants propose to siphon water with a plastic pipeline laid into the creek bed. No stream disturbance is planned or anticipated.*

#### **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: Bull Trout spawners travel out of Noxon Rapids Reservoir and up into the East Fork of the Bull River. The proposed flow rate of 8 gpm for this action is not expected to impact the flows in the East Fork or the main stem of the Bull River.*

**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: No impacts. All drilling activity will be monitored by the USFS.*

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

*Determination: NA. No ponds are proposed in this action.*

**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 are no known saline deposits or problems in this area.*

**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:* All disturbances during this action will be monitored by the USFS and the MT DEQ.

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

*Determination:* No air quality changes are expected during the exploration.

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

*Determination:* No sites of interest were identified in the immediate area.

**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:* Not due to this action. If active mining is becomes a reality, the MT DEQ will prepare a more comprehensive EA and possibly an EIS.

## **HUMAN ENVIRONMENT**

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

*Determination:* This area was explored by US Borax in the late 1980's. The USFS has allowed exploration of this type to proceed in this area for several different projects.

**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:* The exploration action will have a minor impact on these activities and will be completed before the general big games season opens in the fall.

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

*Determination:* This action should have minor to no impacts on human health. If full scale mining is pursued in the future, those wishing to move forward will be required to address this issue in great detail to the MT DEQ and the USFS.

**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: No impact.

**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? None
  - (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? None
  - (c) Existing land uses? Slight potential.
  - (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? Slight temporary positive changes due to this action.
  - (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? Same as response d above.
  - (f) Demands for government services? Slight.
  - (g) Industrial and commercial activity? Slight unless mining on a greater scale is pursued.
  - (h) Utilities? None
  - (i) Transportation? Slight
  - (j) Safety? Slight
  - (k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? Slight for this action.
2. ***Secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical environment and human population:*** None were identified as a result of this action.
3. ***Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures:*** All necessary mitigation measures will be addressed by the USFS and the MT DEQ in their permitting processes.
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 no action alternative would prevent the applicant from utilizing this source of water for their exploratory activities. If this were to happen, they could truck water in from other sources but that may cause more environmental concerns than the preferred alternative. They could also drill or dig a well which would have it's own set of concerns. The preferred alternative would leave no permanent diversion works when testing is completed.

### **PART III. Conclusion**

Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? Not for the exploratory phase of this project.

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

*Name of person responsible for preparation of EA:*

*Name:* Wes McAlpin

*Title:* Water Resources Specialist, KRO RO DNRC

*Date:* June 24, 2010 April 6, 2006