

United States Department of Agriculture Superior National Forest

Forest

Service

8901 Grand Ave. Place Duluth, MN 55808-1122 Phone: (218) 626-4300 Fax: (218) 626-4398

File Code: 1950 Date: March 28, 2011

Dear Sir or Madam:

We have completed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Federal Hardrock Minerals Prospecting Permits Project (Project), located Forest-wide on the Superior National Forest (SNF). A copy of the Draft EIS document, maps, operating plans and prospecting permit applications submitted by the mineral companies are available on the SNF website: <u>www.fs.usda.gov/goto/superior/projects</u>, then scroll down to "Federal Hardrock Minerals Prospecting Permit EIS".

I am interested in your comments on the Draft EIS. Your comments regarding the proposed action and its alternatives will be extremely helpful in assisting me in finalizing the analysis and in making my decision.

Overview

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has received applications to conduct hardrock mineral exploration activities including drilling and geophysical surveys on federally owned minerals on the SNF. The BLM is the federal agency that manages federal hardrock minerals on the SNF. The Forest Service is the surface management agency and therefore the lead agency for the environmental analysis. The SNF must decide whether to provide consent to the BLM to authorize the prospecting permits and operating plans; and if the agency consents, the operating stipulations under which those permits and plans may operate. The Draft EIS for the Project analyzes the potential effects of applications currently under consideration and the potential effects of mineral prospecting activity anticipated over the next twenty years. A more detailed summary of the project can be found in the first section of the Draft EIS.

Preferred Alternative

I have identified Alternative 4 as the preferred alternative, based on how well this alternative addresses issues regarding potential impacts to the forest sound resources while still meeting the purpose and need.

How to Provide Comments

Federal regulations require your comments to be filed within 45 days from which the Draft EIS Notice of Availability is published in the Federal Register. The publication date will be posted on the SNF web page, but is anticipated to be April 1, 2011. Those who provide comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215 regulations. No comments will be accepted after the comment period ends.

Comments must be sent to:

Written comments:

Forest Supervisor Attn: Federal Hardrock Minerals Prospecting Permits Project 8901 Grand Avenue Place, Duluth, MN 55808



Faxed comments:	Forest Supervisor Subject: Federal Hardrock Minerals Prospecting Permits Project FAX: (218) 626-4398
Email comments:	To: <u>comments-eastern-superior@fs.fed.us</u> . Subject: Federal Hardrock Minerals Prospecting Permits Project Acceptable formats for electronic comments are: text (.txt), MSWord 6.0 or higher (.doc), portable document format (.pdf), or rich text format (.rtf). E-mail

Oral or hand-delivered comments: The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Please provide oral comments in person at the Forest Supervisor's office during normal business hours or via telephone to Loretta Cartner, Forest Geologist, at (218) 626-4382.

Please include the following in your comment response: (1) Name and address of the individual or organization; (2) Title of the project; (3) Specific comments on the proposal, along with supporting reasoning and; and (4) signature or other verification of identity on request. I ask that your comments be as specific as possible. Comments received in response to this letter, including the names and addresses of those who comment, are part of the public record for this action and are available for public inspection.

Comments that are specific to this project and include supporting rationale are most useful. If you wish to reference scientific literature in your comments, send a copy of the entire reference cited, and include your rationale as to how or why you feel it is pertinent to the project. This will allow me to fully evaluate your comments.

Please fill out and return the attached comment form with your response. If you do not respond, your name will be taken off the project mailing list.

For regulatory information, please refer to the Code of Federal Regulations 36 CFR 215 (Notice, Comment and Appeal Procedures, 36 CFR 219 (Planning), and 40 CFR 1500 (National Environmental Policy Act).

Public Open Houses

We are hosting three public open houses for this project at the locations and dates listed below. Team members will be available to discuss the project in more detail and answer questions. We hope to see you there. Additional information about the open house locations is posted on the SNF web site. Questions regarding the open houses can be answered by Kristina Reichenbach, Public Affairs Officer, at (218) 626-4393.

April 12	3:30 to 7:00 pm at Superior National Forest Headquarters,
-	8901 Grand Ave Place, Duluth, MN
April 13	3:30 to 7:00 pm at the Norse Conference Room - Mesabi Range Community & Technical
•	College, 1001 Chestnut St. West, Virginia, MN
*	3:30 to 7:00 pm at the Harriet Alexander Nature Center,
	2520 Dale St, Roseville, MN

What's Next

Everyone remaining on the project mailing list will be notified via a letter when I have made my decision. In an effort to reduce our use of natural resources, the Record of Decision and Final EIS will be available on the SNF web page. If we do not receive a comment from you, you will be removed from the project mailing list. If you would like a CD or paper copy of the documents, please indicate this in your comments and on the form. A Final EIS is expected to be available for public review in the fall of 2011.For more information about this project or if you have questions, please contact Loretta Cartner at (218) 626-4382.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

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JAMES W. SANDERS Forest Supervisor

