

File Code: 2850-12850
Date: May 31, 2007

Interested Public

Dear Interested Public:

The Bitterroot National Forest is considering a proposal from Ravalli County Road and Bridge Department for the use of the Lost Horse Quarry on the Darby Ranger District, for a period of 10 years. The area from which they wish to remove rock and excavate material is an existing quarry in the W1/2 Sec.18, T4N, R21W, approximately 4.5 miles up Lost Horse Road and 1000 ft. north on Forest Road #62969. The quarry is in Management Area 3c as identified in the Bitterroot Forest Plan (pg. III-30).

PROPOSED ACTION:

It is proposed to issue a Mineral Materials Contract to Ravalli County Road and Bridge Department for the removal of 125,000 to 150,000 cubic yards of material over 10 years. Ravalli County seeks to remove loose rock from the pit, and excavate new material with a crawler tractor, loader and dump trucks. There would be a primary crushing plant on site to process the rock material. The area of operations would be approximately 4.9 acres in size. The existing perimeter of the quarry would be increased in size.

Rock climbers currently park at the proposed quarry site to access the cliff face to the northwest. The approval of the operating plan would include continued access for parking. The season of operation for the quarry is planned for Mid-October to Mid-April. The quarry would only be operated Monday through Friday. A gate may be installed and would be closed during the operational season.

Access to the site is by Forest Service Road #429 (Lost Horse Road) and Forest Service Road #62969. There is currently a cooperative agreement under schedule A for Ravalli County to maintain 1.4 miles of road #429 under Forest Service jurisdiction, starting in the SE1/4NE _ of Sec. 8, T4, R 21W to Section 17. Ravalli County will be using materials from the Lost Horse Mine to maintain Road #429 as well as other county roads.

Forest Service personnel would inspect the site before, during and upon cessation of each year's operations to ensure compliance with the Plan of Operations and to mitigate any adverse impacts to the environment.

PURPOSE AND NEED:

Disposal of mineral materials, as defined in 36 CFR 228.4(c), must be approved with a Mineral Material Contract. The use of roads on National Forest System lands by commercial entities that results in increased maintenance requires the issuance of a Road Use Permit as per 36 CFR 212.5(c).

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT:

With this letter, I am asking for public comment on the proposal described above. Please review the proposal and send me any comments you have concerning the issuance of the mineral materials permit. Send your comments in writing to District Ranger, Darby Ranger District, P.O. Box 388, Darby, MT 59829. Please submit your comments by July 9, 2007 for consideration.

Internal scoping with staff and resource specialists on the Bitterroot National Forest has not identified any important issues that cannot be resolved with mitigation measures.

An interdisciplinary team has conducted a preliminary environmental analysis for the proposed action. As a result of the analysis, the action has been identified as belonging to a category of actions that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Analysis (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). That category of exclusion is identified in section 31.2(3) of Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Environmental Policy and Procedures, which states "Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of National Forest System lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land."

I am not aware of any extraordinary circumstances that might cause the action to have significant effects. A review of potential extraordinary circumstances will be documented in the project file.

CONTACT PERSON:

For information about the proposed action contact Elizabeth Ballard, Resource Coordinator, located at the Stevensville Ranger District, Bitterroot National Forest, 88 Main St., Stevensville, MT 59870 (406-777-7421)

Sincerely,

/s/ Charles T. Oliver
Charles T. Oliver
District Ranger