

FINAL DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
COEUR ALASKA'S KENSINGTON GOLD MINE 2018-2022
EXPLORATION PROJECT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
JUNEAU RANGER DISTRICT
TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST
JUNEAU, ALASKA
R10-MB-819(D)

DECISION

Based upon my review of Coeur Alaska's Kensington Gold Mine (KGM) 2018-2022 Exploration Project Environmental Assessment (EA) and comments received during public comment periods, I have decided to implement the Proposed Action Alternative with additional measures listed in this document.

DECISION RATIONALE

Large operating mines, such as Coeur Alaska's KGM, are continuously searching for additional mineral deposits within the boundaries of their mining claims. Currently, the mine has 3 to 5 years of minable resources. In order to support further mining, additional resources must be identified.

Though underground exploratory drilling has been successful in adding to the mine's life historically, that type of drilling can only effectively test areas less than 2,000 feet from existing mine infrastructure. The proposed Plan of Operations (Exploration Plan) will allow for testing of known mineralized areas and identification of new areas not accessible from underground operations. There is a need for Coeur Alaska to continue exploration activities to explore for, and develop, mineral resources on federally administered lands.

The Forest Service has considered Coeur Alaska's need to conduct exploration activities to explore for, and develop, mineral resources on National Forest System (NFS) lands. The purpose of the EA was to respond to the proponent's submittal of an Exploration Plan and to ensure operations will be conducted to minimize adverse environmental impacts on NFS lands. The decision that had to be made was to approve the Exploration Plan as submitted, approve the Exploration Plan with additional measures, or select the No Action Alternative.

I selected the Proposed Action Alternative with additional measures for two reasons. First, Coeur Alaska has certain legal rights to explore for and develop mineral resources on public lands. Second, current administrative regulations have allowed the Forest Service to analyze exploration at KGM under a Categorical Exclusion (CE) for a one-year or less disturbance;

however, over the course of time, mineral exploration has become an expected annual occurrence and I wanted to ensure that cumulative effects were appropriately examined.

The selected alternative accomplishes three main goals: 1) Documents a thorough cumulative effects analysis by resource; 2) Allows KGM to conduct certain exploration activities and plans without a restrictive timeline; and 3) Reduces repetitive annual administrative action (NEPA analysis) by the Forest Service. This Alternative meets requirements under the 2016 Tongass Forest Plan.

Coeur Alaska's KGM 2018-2022 Exploration Project EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusion upon which this decision is based. The authorization will be in full compliance with the 2016 Forest Plan and includes mitigation and monitoring elements as needed.

CHANGES TO THE EA

Based on comments received from Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the following changes were made to the EA.

Specific mitigations provided by NMFS have been included in Appendix A of the EA (EA page 29) and are included in the Mitigation and Monitoring Measures section of this document.

ADNR requested consultation before the Forest Service prescribes any seed mix options for reclamation of disturbed areas (see page 30 EA). See the Mitigation and Monitoring Measures section of this document.

ADF&G requested clarification on effects analysis to Management Indicator Species (MIS). See EA page 23-24.

ADF&G requested clarification on the timeframe of wintering habitat for mountain goats. The EA was changed to match the dates (November 15 through April 30) provided by ADF&G (see EA page 24) for wintering habitat and are included in the Mitigation and Monitoring Measures section of this document.

Two comments provided by ADF&G requested clarification on the Wildlife Analysis Areas (WAA) for mountain goats. ADF&G states that the analysis was based upon maps produced during earlier scoping which only provided GPS collar information and did not reference the habitat resource selection function model produced by White and Gregovich in 2017. Although not specifically stated in the EA, the Forest Service mountain goat analysis was based upon the most current data available which includes both GPS collar information and the habitat resource selection function model produced by ADF&G.

ADF&G requested clarification on "minimal habitat loss" on page 27 of the EA. The Forest Service considered the proposed cumulative clearing (25 acres) over the five year project and compared that clearing to the size of the Wildlife Analysis Areas (WAA). The Forest Service determined that over the course of the project, minimal habitat loss will occur and be short term in nature. The total acreage of the WAA (area #s 2408 and 2409) is 63,016 acers. Clearing 25 acres within these WAA represents 0.04% of habitat loss. Coeur Alaska has committed to not clearing more than 5 acres per drilling season, limiting habitat loss within the WAA to less than 0.01% annually. Monitoring of past drill sites has shown that abandoned and reclaimed sites

revegetate naturally within a few years if mitigation measures are adhered to. Overall, habitat loss within the WAA will be spatially and temporally limited.

ADF&G continues to recommend a 4,921 feet buffer, where practicable, for all observed goats regardless of season, not winter habitat as suggested in the EA. I have decided that a 1500 feet buffer from mountain goats from June 16 through October 15 meets Forest Plan direction. Additionally, I have decided to restrict helicopter flights from October 16 through June 15 to avoid wintering and kidding habitat; both decisions are based upon standards and guidelines in the 2016 Forest Plan, a Forest Service Wildlife Biological Evaluation for the EA, and comments received. The EA has been updated on pages 24, 27, and 31.

MITIGATION AND MONITORING MEASURES

The following mitigation and monitoring measures were analyzed in the EA and are being carried forward in my decision.

Mitigation Measures suggested by ADF&G:

- Coeur Alaska must contact ADF&G Habitat Division once specific water withdrawal locations are identified to determine if additional Fish Habitat Permits are required for operating screened intakes.
- Recommend side casting felled trees and slash to avoid blocking game trails.
- Recommend avoiding helicopter use during the periods identified for mountain goats within the areas described. ADF&G comments and maps are available on the project web page at the following link: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=51870>.

Mitigation Measures suggested by NMFS:

- Locate drill holes a minimum of 164 feet from the nearest water source; this distance matches the Tongass National Forest policy.
- Once specific hole locations are identified and USFS fisheries biologist have evaluated the likelihood of adversely affecting fish habitat, USFS staff will promptly notify NMFS of the location if their analysis suggested a likelihood of adversely affecting EFH.

Aquatic Resources

Adhere to the practices described in National Core BMP Technical Guide (USDA, 2012), Forest Service Handbook Alaska Region Soil, and Water Conservation Handbook (FSH 2509.22). Specifically, the operator should be familiar with, and adhere to: Min-1, Min-2, Min-6, Min-7, Min-8, AqEco-2, Plan-3, Road-9, Road-10, Fac-2, Fac-6, and WatUses-1 (USDA, 2012); and 12.4, 12.6, 12.8, 17.1, 17.4 (FSH 2509.22).

The Forest Service requires a minimum distance of 164 feet from water for all proposed activities, including drilling, construction of facilities, helicopter landing pads, hand-dug sumps, and any overland travel (trails) in order to reduce sediment impacts. A Forest Service specialist may grant site-specific exceptions after review and site inspection. To analyze potential impacts to essential fish habitat (EFH), proposed drilling sites located near Class I/II habitat should be visited by a Forest Service fisheries biologist. Consider increasing buffer width between drill

sites and surface water if drill pads are located on a steep slope. Use sediment controls like wattles and silt fences to supplement riparian buffers when necessary. Cease drilling once the ground is no longer able to absorb discharge due to being frozen or saturated.

Keep all products associated with drilling and drill-hole reclamation in secondary containment to prevent escape to the environment. Drill water with cuttings or drill fluids will not be allowed to enter any flowing water. If drill water enters flowing water, activities shall cease until the issue has been rectified.

All diesel fuel and gasoline should be stored in an appropriate secondary containment system. Only minimal amounts of fuel should be stored on site. Fuel should be stored at least 328 feet from flowing water. In areas where this distance is not attainable, Forest Service specialists shall be consulted and redundant/supplemental BMPs must be used.

Conduct significant maintenance on equipment at a properly controlled, offsite facility. Perform onsite fueling and minor maintenance in an area that is clean, dry, and covered. Conduct refueling and servicing well away from water bodies.

No machinery or equipment (other than intake hoses) shall enter streams or wetlands.

Use gravity-fed water lines where feasible to limit accidental intake of fish. To minimize impacts to fish, water withdrawals shall be located on small, high gradient streams to avoid habitat used by fish of any species. In situations when stream levels are extremely low and field crews experience difficulty maintaining sufficient intake flows, work shall be suspended until flows increase to minimize potential dewatering impacts to fish in downstream Class I and II habitat.

Restore drill sites before moving to the next, when practicable.

Sensitive and Invasive Plants

Botanical surveys will be completed during the growing season and up to 18 months in advance of drill pad construction. A report will then be submitted to the Forest Service for review.

If sensitive plants are encountered, protect the population, avoid disturbance, and contact the Juneau District Ranger.

Monitoring of any identified sensitive plants must occur to avoid indirect and direct effects.

Wash and inspect tools and drilling equipment prior to first entering an un-infested area, or before re-entering an un-infested area after use in an area that is potentially infested by invasive plants, e.g. developed areas such as drill sites adjacent to roads and other areas of disturbed or altered vegetation.

Revegetate disturbed ground if prompt natural regeneration is not expected. Use local native vegetation when available, or an approved weed-free seed mix. See current Tongass National Forest revegetation guidelines on the project web page for procedures and appropriate mixes. The Forest Service will consult with ADNR regarding seed mix options before finalizing any prescribed seed mix use for reclamation of disturbed areas.

Wildlife

If any previously undiscovered endangered, threatened, candidate or sensitive species or key habitats for any MIS or other species identified in this document are encountered prior to or

during the implementation of this project, a Juneau District Ranger shall be consulted and appropriate measures enacted.

To avoid disturbing any raptor nests, maintain flight paths 600 feet above ground level and avoid flying within 600 feet vertically and horizontally of any known nest sites. Before performing any helicopter-supported survey, the Forest Service must be consulted to determine whether additional mitigations are necessary. Prior to clearing any proposed sites, a third-party contractor wildlife biologist, independent of Coeur Alaska, will field check suitable habitat within 600 feet of the platform site for nesting northern goshawks using a tree-by-tree search (prior to June 1) or broadcast acoustic survey (June 1 through August 15). If nests or potential nests are found, they will be reported immediately to the Juneau District Ranger so the 2016 Forest Plan (page 4-88, Section VIII) standards and guidelines can be implemented.

Although bears are expected to be uncommon in the area due to the lack of foraging resources, they can be attracted by food, garbage, petroleum products, and novel items. To meet 2016 Forest Plan standards and guidelines for bears (page 4-88), the proponent is required to store and/or remove human foods, garbage, and other attractants in ways to make it unavailable to bears to reduce habituation and human/bear incidents, even while the crew is on site.

The project is located within mountain goat wintering and kidding habitat. The 2016 Forest Plan direction for mountain goats (page 4-91 to 4-92) must be followed. Specifically, 1) permanent infrastructure and human activities should be located a mile from wintering and kidding habitat; 2) aircraft should maintain a 1,500 feet vertical and horizontal buffer from summer and kidding habitat and goats, where feasible, and avoid kidding areas altogether from May 15 to June 15; and 3) important winter habitat identified by the ADFG study should be maintained.

To meet Forest Plan direction, helicopter and drilling related activities (with the exception of road supported drilling in the Jualin AOI) should not begin before June 16 to allow nannies and kids in the project area to move to summer habitat, and should be completed by October 15 to allow goats to return to winter habitat. As with previous years' operations, road supported drilling in the Jualin AOI is in close proximity to active mining operations and presents little or no additional disturbance.

Cultural Resources

An archaeological survey will be required if drilling occurs at less than 100-foot elevation in the eastern section of the Big Lake AOI.

If previously undocumented cultural resources are encountered, work in the immediate area shall cease immediately, the Forest Service notified, and the resource evaluated for significance prior to proceeding to proceeding with work.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered the No Action alternative in the EA. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA (Page 4).

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no change to the existing practice of using a Categorical Exclusion (CE) to analyze potential effects of annually-submitted mineral exploration plans for the Kensington Gold Mine. Previous analyses have been completed annually under 36 CFR 220.6(e)(8), “Short-term (1-year or less) mineral, energy, or geophysical investigation and their incidental support activities that may require cross-county travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than 1 mile of low standard road, or use and minor repair of existing roads.”

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the July 1, 2017, Tongass National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the analysis. The public was invited to review and comment on the proposal. On June 06, 2017, 27 individuals, government, and tribal entities were mailed scoping letters through U.S. Mail, and 629 electronic scoping messages were sent to a mailing list populated through public interest at (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=51870>). On December 20, 2017, a notice to comment on the Environmental Assessment was mailed via U.S. Mail to 27 entities and electronically to 597 entities. A complete mailing list is available in the project record. The Legal Notice for the formal 30-day comment period was published in the Juneau Empire on December 21, 2017, and the EA was posted on the Tongass National Forest projects webpage (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/tongass/landmanagement/projects>) for distribution. The Legal Notice for the formal 45-day Objection Opportunity was published in the Juneau Empire on February 14, 2018.

Comments were received from ADF&G on July 10, 2017 and January 23, 2018; both comments generally relate to mountain goats. Those comments have been addressed in the Changes to the EA section, and the Mitigation and Monitoring section of this document. One public comment was received during the legal comment period for the EA; however, the comment did not include specific information related to the proposed action. Comments addressed in this document are available on the project web page.

CHANGES TO MITIGATIONS

The mitigations included in this document and the EA reflect comments received from ADF&G, ADNR, and NMFS during the legal comment periods.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

National Forest Management Act / 2016 Tongass Land and Resources Management Plan

Coeur Alaska’s KGM 2018-2022 Exploration Project DN/FONSI includes mitigations intended to avoid or minimize environmental impacts and must be complied with by law, regulation, or policy. These mitigations include, but are not limited to, best management practices (BMPs), Forest Plan standards and guidelines, and standard operating procedures. The Selected Alternative was designed in exact accord with all applicable land use designations and forest-wide standards and guidelines of the Forest Plan.

Endangered Species Act (1973, as amended)

Biological evaluations were completed for threatened, endangered, candidate, and sensitive species.

The Endangered Species Act does not require consultation for no effect determinations; therefore, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) were not consulted. Both agencies were included in scoping.

There are no known occurrences of goshawk in the areas of interest; however, one active nest has been located in the KGM Project Area. Some disturbance could occur to nesting or foraging goshawks during project activities. By implementing Forest Plan standards and guidelines to survey for nesting goshawks prior to drilling, and to protect identified nesting sites by establishing territories and limited operating periods, these disturbances are expected to be minor.

Given the conservation measures, operational guidelines, and permit compliance, the project has no effect on Humpback Whales and Steller Sea Lions. No exploration activities will occur in marine waters.

I find that no significant effects would occur to federally listed threatened and endangered species as a result of this decision.

Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (1940, as amended)

The National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (USFWS 2007) has been referenced when working or authorizing activities near eagle nests. No drilling is planned to occur near known eagle nests based on GIS analysis. However, helicopter flights to and from the area could disturb nesting eagles. Consistent with Forest Plan standards and guidelines, helicopters are expected to maintain flight paths 1000-feet from nests (except for safety reasons). There are no known nests within 1000-feet of the helicopter base or any of the proposed drilling pads. The proposed action is expected to have negligible effects on bald eagles and is consistent with the 2016 Forest Plan, and thus, the conservation strategy for bald eagles. Therefore, I have determined that no impacts to bald eagle are expected.

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966

This project was reviewed for potential effects to historic properties, in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR 800), resulting in an agency determination of “No historic properties adversely affected”. The State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with this determination. Therefore, I determine that there are no anticipated adverse effects to historic properties.

ANILCA Section 810 and Section 811, Subsistence Evaluation and Finding

This project was evaluated to determine potential effects on subsistence opportunities and resources. The project area occurs in Wildlife Analysis Areas (WAA) 2408 and 2409. These WAA are within the Haines community use area but they are not within the area from which residents of any rural community obtained approximately 75% of their average annual deer harvest (USDA FS 2008). Based on the MIS analysis for deer above, no significant change in deer distribution or abundance is expected to result from implementing this project. Access to the project area will remain unchanged. The proposed project would not result in a significant

possibility of a restriction of subsistence use of wildlife, fish, or other foods. Therefore I have determined that there would not be a significant change or restriction of access to subsistence resources.

Clean Water Act (1977, as amended)

The objective of the Clean Water Act is to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's Waters (USDA FS 990A, 2012). Management standards, guidelines, practices, and permitting have been established to address the Clean Water Act on Forest Service lands. This project will implement National and State BMPs and Forest Plan standards and guidelines, and acquire all necessary permits prior to commencement. I have determined that this project fully complies with the Clean Water Act and that no significant impact to water quality is expected to occur from this decision.

Clean Air Act (1970, as amended)

The cumulative exhaust for all exploration equipment is insignificant relative to the State of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) permitted emissions at the KGM (ADEC Final Air Quality Control Minor Permit No. AQ 0111MSS01 issued on June 24, 2005). Therefore, I have determined that no significant impact to air quality would be expected to occur from this decision.

Marine Mammal Protection Act (1972, as amended)

The Humpback whale and the Stellar sea-lion are protected under the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act, which prohibits "take" of marine mammals, including whales (16 USC 1361–1421h, October 21, 1972, as amended). Take means to harass, hunt, capture or kill, or attempt to harass, hunt, capture, or kill.

No activities will occur in marine waters from the proposed action. Helicopter traffic would primarily be over land and a small near-shore area where the frequency of whale and sea lion presence is expected to be very low. In addition, Forest Service permittees are required to follow Forest Plan standards and guidelines pertaining to marine mammals. This includes following NMFS guidelines for minimizing impacts to marine mammals. The proposed action is not expected to increase marine disturbance or alter the marine environment.

Given the conservation measures, operational guidelines, and permit compliance discussed above, I have determined that the project will have no effect on the Humpback whale, or Steller sea lion critical habitat and is not expected to increase marine disturbance or alter the marine environment.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act

Pursuant to Section 305(b) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, when a federal agency authorizes, funds, or undertakes an action that may adversely affect essential fish habitat (EFH), they are required to consult with NMFS. Drilling near a Class 1 or 2 stream may increase the likelihood that EFH will be impacted. When precise exploratory drilling locations are known, a Forest Service fisheries biologist will determine if consultation with NMFS is necessary.

If all mitigations and proposed design features are adhered to, there will be no adverse impacts to fisheries resources, EFH, including fresh water and tidal/intertidal zone fisheries, or special status or listed species.

Executive Order 11988 - Floodplain Management

This activity will not affect the functional value of any floodplain as defined by Executive Order 11988. No activities associated with this project are to occur in floodplains or streams. Further, design features and mitigations reduce or eliminate risks associated with surface exploration activities.

Executive Order 11990 - Protection of Wetlands

This activity will not have negative impacts on wetlands as defined by Executive Order 11990. The purpose of Executive Order 11990 is to minimize the destruction, loss, or degradation of wetlands and to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands. To meet these objectives, the Order requires federal agencies, in planning their actions, to consider alternatives to wetland sites and limit potential damage if an activity affecting a wetland cannot be avoided. Proposed drilling sites will be kept a minimum of 164 feet away from wetlands designated in the USFWS National Wetlands Inventory (USFWS 2016). As proposed drill sites are reviewed by the Forest Service and by a third party professional biologist, additional wetlands may be discovered; if this occurs, the wetland will be given a 164-foot buffer.

Executive Order 12962 – Recreational Fisheries

This executive order addresses recreational fishing in the United States. Federal agencies are required, to the extent permitted by law and where practicable, and in cooperation with States and Tribes, to improve the quantity, function, sustainable productivity, and distribution of U.S. aquatic resources for increased recreational fishing opportunities. The potential impacts of the project on EFH have been evaluated, and the proposed activities are anticipated to have no long-term adverse effect on EFH and/or recreational fisheries. When precise exploratory drilling locations are known, a Forest Service fisheries biologist will determine if consultation with NMFS is necessary. Therefore, I determine that no significant impacts to recreational fisheries would occur as a result of this decision.

Executive Order 13007 – Indian Sacred Sites

Executive Order 13007, Indian Sacred Sites, provides presidential direction to federal agencies to give consideration to the protection of American Indian sacred sites and allow access where feasible. A Forest Service archeologist reviewed the project and found no conflict with Executive Order 13007.

In a government-to-government relationship, the tribal government is responsible for notifying the agency of the existence of a sacred site. A sacred site is defined as a site that has sacred significance due to established religious beliefs or ceremonial uses, and which has a specific, discrete, and delineated location that has been identified by the tribe. Tribal governments or their authorized representatives have not identified any specific sacred site locations in the project area.

Executive Order 13112 – Invasive Species

This order directs all Federal agencies to identify actions which may affect the status of invasive species, prevent the introduction of invasive species, detect and respond rapidly to and control populations of such species, monitor invasive species populations, and to provide for restoration of native species and habitat conditions in ecosystems that have been invaded. An invasive plant risk assessment has been completed for this project; the findings, and recommendations of which are incorporated into the project decision. Mitigation measures are incorporated into the project to reduce the potential for introduction and spread of invasive species. Implementation of this project, including treatments and mitigation measures, is expected to have a low risk for potential invasive plant introductions and spread. Therefore, I determine that this project will not result in significant impacts from invasive species introduction or spread in the project area.

Executive Order 13175 - Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments

Executive Order 13175 directs federal agencies to respect tribal self-government, sovereignty, and tribal rights, and to engage in regular and meaningful government-to-government consultation with federally recognized tribes on proposed actions with tribal implications.

Throughout the span of the Coeur Alaska's KGM 2018-2022 Exploration Project, the Forest Service has been in contact with Angoon Community Association, Douglas Indian Association, Gold Belt Incorporated, Hoonah Indian Association, Huna Totem Corporation, Kootznoowoo Incorporated, Sealaksa Corporation, and Shee Atika Incorporated.

Executive Order 13186 – Migratory Birds

Executive Order 13186 provides for the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats and requires the evaluation of the effects of Federal actions on migratory birds, with an emphasis on species of concern. Agencies are required to support the conservation and intent of the migratory bird conventions by integrating bird conservation principles, measures, and practices into agency activities and by avoiding or minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse impacts on migratory bird resources when conducting agency actions.

A variety of bird habitats occur in the project area. Minimal changes to habitat are expected. Some disturbance of nesting and foraging birds is likely during project activities. There is a low potential that project activities could result in the nests of some migratory birds being destroyed or abandoned during the breeding season. The magnitude of the effects would vary, depending on the season but the size of the area affected is very small. The greatest effects would occur during May and June but by September, the young birds have fledged and they would not be directly affected by any of the proposed activities. This project would have negligible to minor effects on migratory birds and bird species of concern. The proposed action is consistent with the Forest Plan standards and guidelines for these species and thus the conservation strategy. Therefore, I determine no impact to any species' viability is expected.

Executive Order 13443 – Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation

Executive Order 13443 directs federal agencies to facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting opportunities and the management of game species and their habitat. The analysis considered and disclosed the effects on hunting activities. The Selected Alternative is expected to maintain the current hunting opportunities by adhering to the Forest Plan standards and guidelines that maintain habitat for hunted species.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact. (40 CFR 1508.27)

CONTEXT

Context refers to the affected environment in which the proposed action would occur. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, 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 (40 CFR 1508.27(a)). Both short- and long-term effects are relevant.

Coeur Alaska's exploration project is a site-specific action that would take place within the project area that includes both patented and unpatented Federal and State mining claims. Exploratory drilling will be limited to occur within five areas of interest (AOI) that reside within the boundaries of the project area. Geologic mapping, soil sampling, and geophysical surveying will extend beyond the AOI into the surrounding project area.

The discussion of the significance criteria that follows applies to the Selected Alternative and is within the context of local importance. None of the effects identified, including direct, indirect, and cumulative effects, are considered significant, and all resources meet or exceed their respective Forest Plan standards and guidelines.

INTENSITY

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial.** Effects are anticipated to be negligible for the Selected Alternative (See EA pages 11-25) with mitigations included in this document and Appendix A in the EA.
2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.** There will be no significant effects to public health and safety because the exploratory locations are remote and difficult to access, no harmful chemicals or substances will be used, and the public is restricted from active drill sites by Coeur Alaska for safety reasons. Some public use is expected to occur near the project area in the form of sport fishing, crabbing, dispersed camping, hunting, boating, and wildlife viewing (See Page 17 in the EA); however, no public roads or lakes large enough for planes are available to directly access the AOI.
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area because:

There are currently no documented historic properties located within the AOIs. No

drilling will occur outside of the AOI, all of which is low sensitivity for cultural resources. This project was reviewed for potential effects to historic properties resulting in an agency determination of “No historic properties adversely affected”. The State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with this determination (See Page 14 in the EA).

No known rare or sensitive plants species occur inside of the AOI where drilling will occur (See Pages 16 in the EA). However, of the 18 designated sensitive plants in the Alaska Region, ten species are suspected to occur within the varying habitats of the project area. The adverse impacts to all ten species of sensitive plants analyzed are low because botanical surveys will be conducted at drilling sites before entry. If sensitive plants are detected, drilling sites will be relocated to avoid disturbance.

The proposed action conforms to the direction and objectives of the 2016 Forest Plan; the project is located within the land use designations (LUD) of Remote Recreation, Berners Bay LUD II, Old-growth, and Modified Landscape (See page 1 of the EA).

Recreation use tends to occur near the shore in Berners Bay, not within the AOI where the proposed action would occur (See Page 17 in the EA).

4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action. The EA acknowledges that risks exist but are offset by mitigations in Appendix A of the EA and this document.
5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The Agency has considerable experience with actions like the one proposed. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. No unique or unknown risks were identified during scoping.
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.** The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. The EA acknowledges that risks exist but are offset by mitigations listed in Appendix A of the EA and in this document.
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** The cumulative effects of this project include past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions that will overlap in space and time. The effects of the action are limited to the local area and there are no other effects that would be additive to the effects of the proposed action (See EA pages 25-28).
8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed, 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 action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places because cultural sites that are present are currently being mitigated according to the terms of a Memorandum Of Agreement with the Forest Service, Alaska

State Historic Preservation Officer and Coeur Alaska. A Forest Service archeologist has reviewed this project and has made a determination under the provisions of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of no adverse effect for the proposed project. The State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with this determination (See EA page 14).

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 action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973 (See EA pages 22-23). Alaska Department of Fish and Game and National Marine Fisheries Service were included in scoping.
10. **Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. The action is consistent with the 2016 Forest Plan. The KGM project area is located within the land use designations (LUD) of Remote Recreation, Berners Bay LUD II, Old-growth, and Modified Landscape all of which are open to mineral entry.

After considering the effects of the actions analyzed, in terms of context and intensity, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

OBJECTION OPPORTUNITIES

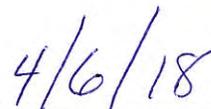
This decision was subject to objection pursuant to 36 CFR 218, and a legal notice of the opportunity to object was published on February 14, 2018, in the Juneau Empire and sent to those who provided comments during project development. No objections were filed during the 45-day objection period.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented any time after the date of signature.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Curtis Caton, Tongass National Forest, 8510 Mendenhall Loop Road, Juneau Alaska, 99801. (907)789-6273. curtislcaton@fs.fed.us

Brad Orr
District Ranger

Date

USDA Non-Discrimination Policy Statement

[DR 4300.003 USDA Equal Opportunity Public Notification Policy \(June 2, 2015\)](#)

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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