



File Code: 1950/2820

Date: February 18, 2001

Dear Interested Citizen:

The St. Joe Ranger District of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests is beginning the process of analysis and preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) regarding recreational digging, commercial leasing and/or sale of the garnet resource. The Project Area includes Emerald, Wood, Hidden and Catspur Creek drainages. These areas are defined by the same underlying geology. The project area drains into the West Fork of St. Maries River.

The area's garnet resource consists of both sands and gemstones. The sands are used for industrial purposes, primarily as abrasives. The Project Area also produces extraordinary quality and quantity of large garnets, with some of the drainages producing star garnets (the Idaho State gemstone). These gemstones are used commercially for jewelry and are sought after by recreationists.

The Forest Service has operated a public digging area for gemstones since the 1970s. Currently, the Forest Service fee-permit recreational dig area is operated in the 281 Gulch. We estimate that there is 2-5 years left of digging in this gulch. Other potential areas that could provide public digging for gemstones need to be evaluated.

Much of the area, on public and private lands, has been mined for many years and there are currently ten pending prospecting permits, extensions and/or lease applications.

A study done in conjunction with the United States Geological Survey was completed to determine the location of known or suspected deposits of both forms of garnet. This study will be used as a basis for this analysis. However, the full extent of the garnet resource has not been proven with field- testing.



Purpose and Need for this project:

- Respond to interest in developing the mineral resource that has been expressed by the public, while conserving the garnet resource for future generations of recreational garnet seekers.
- Gemstone deposits within the current Forest Service recreational digging area in 281 Gulch are becoming depleted. If the Forest Service is going to continue to provide this unique recreational digging opportunity, other areas need to be tested and identified where the resource may be developed.
- Resolve ten pending lease applications, permit applications and permit extensions for both garnets and sand, dating back to 1996.

Proposed Action

- The Forest Service would reserve certain tributaries of the East Fork of Emerald Creek and Wood Creek for public recreational digging of gemstones. These areas would not be available for commercial lease. These drainages will be tested with backhoe trenches to determine the best areas for the recreational digging. Following testing, an order of priority by drainage would be defined and listed. There are five testing areas and all five will be analyzed in the DEIS.
- The pending lease application for garnet gemstones on Bechtel Butte would be approved.
- The project area, with the exception of the drainages reserved for recreational gemstone digging, would be available for commercial lease and / or sale.
- The pending lease renewal applications for garnet sands in Emerald Creek (when, where, how) would be approved.
- The pending prospecting permit applications for garnet (when, where, how) would be approved.
- The pending prospecting permit extension for garnet (when, where, how) would be approved.
- The conditions and reclamation requirements under which recreational and commercial garnet mining within the project area would be developed.
- It is possible that this proposal would require a non-significant Forest Plan amendment.

A mailing list was developed from various address lists containing names of people interested in the garnet resource, i.e. recreational digging, prospecting permit applicants, etc. I am enclosing a letter for you to indicate your interest in this project and whether or not you would like to continue to be informed regarding this project. This is also an opportunity to let us know your desired format for the DEIS and subsequent documents. **Please respond by March 20, 2001.**

I am very interested in your comments and concerns. Your comments are most valuable if they are specific to the project area. We will be developing existing conditions and alternatives this spring and expect to have the Draft Environmental Impact Statement complete in September 2001.

You may call or write to me at this address: George Bain, Garnet Stars & Sands, St. Joe Ranger District, P.O. Box 407, St. Maries, ID 83802, 208-245-2531. If you have questions, you may also call the Project Leader, Tracy Gravelle, at 208-245-4517.

Sincerely,

GEORGE M. BAIN
District Ranger
St. Joe Ranger District

GARNET STARS & SANDS PROJECT

Please send this form to us if you want to continue to be on the mailing list for this project. Feel free to add your comments to this page or include them separately. We would appreciate comments back to us by March 20, 2001.

We anticipate that the Draft EIS will be available in September, 2001 and the Final EIS and Record of Decision in Spring 2002. For the convenience of our interested public and in an effort to reduce costs, documents related to this proposal will be available to the public on our Forest's internet web page (<http://www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/>). Those people wishing to remain on the mailing list will receive the documents in compact disc (CD) format. **Printed copies will only be provided to those who request them. The printed copy of the DEIS is normally a spiral - bound book and is likely to be 300+ pages. A summary of the EIS is also compiled and this is much smaller and likely to be 50+ pages.** Please fill in your address, check your format preference and return this form to:

St. Joe Ranger District
Garnet Stars & Sands Project
P.O. Box 407
St. Maries, ID 83861

___ I am interested in staying on the mailing list for this project.

___ Please do not send any more information to me on this project. I will access information on the web page if desired.

___ I would like to receive a printed copy of the DEIS and subsequent documents.

___ I do not need the entire Draft Environmental Impact Statement but I would like a printed copy of the EIS SUMMARIES and Record of Decision.

----- **Form continued on back side** -----

If we do NOT hear back from you, your name will be removed from the mailing list for this project.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

YOUR COMMENTS WILL BE CONSIDERED PART OF THE PUBLIC RECORD:

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215 or 217. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27 (d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 10 days.

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