

File Code: 2810; 1950

Date: February 8, 2023

Greetings,

The Hell Canyon Ranger District is requesting your comments on a proposed exploratory drilling project. F3 Gold, LLC (F3) of Minneapolis, Minnesota, is proposing the Newark Exploration Drilling Project (the project). The project is proposing exploratory drilling west of Custer city, Custer County, South Dakota, in Sections 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, T.03 S., R. 04 E. and Sections 24, 25, T. 03 S., R. 03 E (see Figure 1. Vicinity Map). The Plan of Operations was submitted to the United States Department of Agriculture - Forest Service on September 8, 2020, with amendments submitted July 20, 2021, and August 15, 2022. The proposed Plan of Operation may be subject to changes based on the forthcoming environmental review. The purpose of this letter is to inform you of this proposal and to solicit your input on the project.

The project proposes diamond core drilling at no more than 39 drill sites, temporary access routes (12 feet width), drill pad site clearing (as needed), and reclamation activities. Each drill site would have a maximum footprint of approximately 2,500 square feet (0.06 acres), where the drilling rig, rod tray, support vehicles, portable cutting tank, and water truck will be placed. The width of the drill holes is approximately 3-4 inches and would range from 500 to 3,000



Figure 1. Vicinity Map

(maximum) feet in depth dependent on the results of each hole. Average drill depth would be 1,000 to 2,000 feet. Depending on the results of preceding drill holes, some of the drill sites may not be needed and would ultimately not be constructed. Three staging areas (0.25 acres each) would be used to store equipment and tools. The project (including drill pads, staging areas, and temporary travel routes) would result in ground disturbing activities equaling less than five total acres of National Forest System land.

The primary access to the project area will be County Road 286 (Upper French Creek Road) and National Forest System Road 781 (Wabash Spring Road) both via US Highway 16. Additional roads that are anticipated to be used for access include National Forest System Roads 654, 654.1A, 654.1B, 504, and 781.1G. In addition, approximately 5,500 linear feet of 12-foot-wide temporary overland routes may be constructed for drill site access. These temporary overland routes would be obliterated and returned to natural conditions after project completion.

No mining, milling, or processing is proposed as part of this project. Any water used for the drilling would be sourced from an approved municipal or industrial source; no water would be sourced from local surface waters.

Our initial review proposes to evaluate this project as a Categorical Exclusion (CE) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) per 36 CFR 220.6(e)(8) – “*Short-term (1 year or less) mineral, energy, or geophysical investigations and their incidental support activities that may require cross-country travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than 1 mile of low standard road, or use and minor repair of existing roads.*” As a result, documentation of a CE will be prepared to facilitate planning, decision making and public disclosure.

Your comments would be most helpful if provided within 30 days of the date of this letter. Ways to provide your input include: email at: comments-rocky-mountain-black-hills-hell-canyon@usda.gov with “*Newark Exploration Drilling Project*” as the subject; hand written comments can be mailed via US Postal Service to:

Rob Hoelscher, District Ranger
1019 North 5th Street
Custer, SD 57730

Comments may also be hand delivered to the address above; verbal comments can also be taken by calling our office at 605-673-9301. Comments submitted, including names and addresses of commenters, are public information.

For your convenience a copy of this scoping letter and the attached map, the accepted Plan of Operations, and other supporting documents can be found on the project website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=63527>.

The Hell Canyon Ranger District would like to invite you to a public meeting:

Where: Custer High School, Commons Area
1645 Wildcat Ln, Custer, SD 57730

When: February 16, 2023 (Thursday), 5:00pm-7:00pm

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact: Jonathan Manning, Project Leader: Jonathan.Manning2@usda.gov, Wendy Schuyler, District NEPA Planner: Wendy.Schuyler@usda.gov, or myself, Rob Hoelscher, at the Hell Canyon Ranger District office in Custer, SD, at (605) 673-9301, Monday through Friday between 8:00AM and 4:30PM MST.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



ROB HOELSCHER
District Ranger

Enclosures: Project Map