

Author: Dave Shaver at NP-WASO-GRD
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----- Message Contents -----

GEOLOGIC RESOURCES DIVISION -- NATURAL RESOURCES PROGRAM CENTER
February 1997 Monthly Report (Better late than never!?)

GEOLOGIC RESOURCES - GENERAL

FOSSIL HELP IS ON THE WAY: Geologic Resources Division staff and Herb Meyer, Florissant Fossil Beds NM paleontologist, met with the Denver Museum of Natural History staff to discuss a formal partnership between the museum and NPS. Museum management and the volunteers are enthusiastic about developing a partnership with NPS focused on providing museum-trained volunteers to assist NPS paleontological projects. The museum has a nationally recognized certification program in paleontology that has graduated about 60 people. Many of these graduates are interested in non-museum volunteer opportunities. These volunteers could assist parks with surveying, monitoring, inventorying, excavating, and interpreting paleontological sites. This work would be done at no cost to parks. However, parks would need to provide a park contact and a camp area near the paleontological site. A formal agreement between NPS and the Denver Museum of Natural History is being prepared. The Division hopes to have a formal agreement and a pilot site selected by the end of FY97. Interested parks should contact Bob Higgins, Lindsay McClelland, or Herb Meyer, via CCMail.

GIP GETS NATIONAL ATTENTION: Three professional geologic societies advertised the division's Geologist-in-the-Park (GIP) program and web site in their monthly publications: GSA TODAY, GEOLOGY, and NSS NEWS (National Speleological Society). The web page describes over 40 geoscience opportunities in more than 30 national parks. Parks are encouraged to use this site to help fill their geoscience positions. It is at: <http://www.aqd.nps.gov/natnet/grd/geojob/geojob.htm>

U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY LIAISON: The NPS maintains liaison offices in each of the three USGS Regions: Eastern (Reston, VA), Central (Denver, CO), and Western (Menlo Park, CA). The liaisons coordinate cooperative projects between the two agencies, seek new project opportunities, and maintain a list of ongoing cooperative projects and their status. The liaisons will also help link parks with USGS geologists, for assistance on particular geological issues. In addition, park staff with specific concerns may wish to contact one of the USGS geologists assigned to particular parks. Through this program, the USGS has assigned a geologist to each of 140 parks with significant geological resources. These geologists will serve as points of contact, helping parks directly in some cases, or referring the park to an appropriate geologist inside or outside the USGS. To obtain a list of USGS geologists-in-the-park, please contact Jim F. Wood via CC:Mail.

MINERALS MANAGEMENT - GENERAL

CONSISTENT TREATMENT OF MINING CLAIMANTS UNDER BLM FEE REGULATIONS UNDERSCORED IN ALASKA: At the request of the Alaska Support Office, the Division provided the Alaska Solicitor's office with documents

explaining the nationwide BLM/NPS policy and procedures implementing the "small miner" exemption from the annual \$100 fee required for all Federal mining claims. The Regional Solicitor's office was unfamiliar with the national procedures, as articulated in a 1996 Federal Register notice and in subsequent Bureau memoranda. A conference call among the NPS staff and the Solicitor's office clarified that the national policy will now be carried out in Alaska. This clarification resulted in the forfeiture, and therefore NPS acquisition, of several mining claims in Bering Land Bridge National Preserve. In light of the apparent confusion on the part of many mining claimants about the regulatory requirements, division staff drafted a letter on behalf of the Alaska Support Office that explained how to fulfill the requirements for the small miner waiver. (Brunner)

NPS REFINES POLICY ON VALIDITY EXAMS: In response to concerns raised by Mojave National Preserve regarding the California Desert Protection Act's apparent requirement of conducting validity exams prior to approving a plan of operations solely for reclamation work, the division staff examined the Act and current NPS validity exam policies. We concluded that reclamation work, such as removal of personal property from unpatented mining claims, does not as a matter of law or policy require a validity examination. This interpretation was concurred in by the Regional Solicitor's office and will shortly be issued as a written policy. Additionally, the Division provided comments to the Superintendent of Mojave NP on a plan of operations submitted for removal of personal property and reclamation. (Brunner)

WILDERNESS STEERING COMMITTEE GIVES THE GREEN LIGHT TO DEVELOP GUIDANCE ON MINING IN WILDERNESS: Parks with mining claims in wilderness areas have expressed concerns about the lack of detailed NPS wilderness guidance. Accordingly, division staff distilled five of the most urgent concerns into a working paper examining technical, legal, and regulatory aspects of mining in wilderness, and presented the paper to the NPS National Wilderness Steering Committee at its third meeting. The Committee generally agreed with the assessment of the issues and requested that we develop an interpretation of the mandates of managing minerals in wilderness, seek Solicitor input where necessary, and formulate guidance. The Division has followed up by requesting the San Francisco Field Solicitor's Office to address three legal issues about mining activities and NPS wilderness and suggests Department resolution. We are also working to add mining provisions to the Committee's draft wilderness guidelines. The current effort focuses on mining claims in wilderness; it is anticipated that the guidance will be extended in the near future to other nonfederal mineral interests. (Brunner)

ALASKA REGION

DIRECTOR UPHOLDS ALASKA REGION'S DECISION TO PLACE STIPULATIONS ON MINING PLAN IN DENALI: The Division prepared the Director's response to an appeal by Steve Hicks, a mining claim operator in Alaska, regarding the Regional Director's decision to impose stipulations on Mr. Hicks' proposed appraisal sampling on three claim groups in Denali NP & P. The Director's office sent the signed response, upholding the regional decision, to Mr. Hicks by certified mail on 2/4/97. Two weeks later, the Division learned that Mr. Hicks has appealed another NPS decision to the Alaska RD. In response to a request from Alaska staff, the Division provided some guidance on this latest appeal. Additionally, the Division will draft the response for the Director in the very likely event that Mr. Hicks appeals another unfavorable RD decision. (Brunner)

INTERMOUNTAIN REGION

COMMENTS OF A PREHISTORIC NATURE: Division staff reviewed and commented on Vince Santucci's draft paper "The Yellowstone Paleontological Survey". It is an excellent approach for identification of fossil resources. The park can use this document to incorporate fossil resources into the natural resource management and Interpretation programs. The format used in this report may prove beneficial for other parks as a model for their surveys. To our knowledge, there is not set timeframe for a final report and the draft is still in review status. (Higgins)

PECOS MINE TAILINGS RESTORATION PROJECT PROPOSALS DEVELOPED: Division staff helped Pecos NHP develop statements and costs for Company-funded projects to mitigate damages incurred by the park as a result of the Terraro Mine and El Molino Tailings remedial action. Both the Terraro Mine and El Molino Tailings impoundment are located upstream of the park. Remedial action is underway to stabilize the tailings, and feasibility studies are in progress in relation to final closure of waste rock dumps at the mine. The Company accepted proposals, from any stakeholder in the upper Pecos Basin, for potential funding of watershed rehabilitation projects (i.e., not necessarily mining related). Three potential projects to treat active erosion were identified within the park. In addition, RMP Project Statements were written to inventory several miles of ranch roads for erosion activity/potential and treatment options. The roads were acquired in the 1990 park expansion and many are causing accelerated erosion and downstream sedimentation; most are not needed to conduct park operations (Steensen).

PACIFIC WEST REGION

OPEN PIT GOLD MINE PROPOSED AT MOJAVE: A mining company, Golden Quail, Inc., has proposed to conduct open pit gold mining operations in Mojave NP. Division staff have provided extensive technical and regulatory/policy assistance to Mojave since Golden Quail first submitted their proposal in September 1996. As a first step, the Division largely compiled the NPS's response to Golden Quail's proposed plan of operations. This response included interpretation of the NPS mining regulations (36 CFR Part 9A) and solid waste disposal regulations (36CFR Part 6) that are applicable to the proposed operations, and a request for additional information about the proposed operation. Golden Quail was not pleased by the NPS's interpretation of its own regulations, and since January has written two voluminous letters to the Superintendent. In response, the Division reviewed the BLM's case file of Golden Quail's activities between 1982 and 1993 and prepared a summary of the documents therein and relevant observations. The Division then drafted two letters to Golden Quail. The first asked Golden Quail to verify that the BLM case file is complete. Upon receiving an affirmative response, the Division drafted a letter explaining the application of NPS regulations to the proposed operation. Approved by the Regional Solicitor's office, the second letter was sent by Superintendent Martin to Golden Quail. Meanwhile, the Division is initiating the validity examination of the thirteen mining claims affected by Golden Quail's initial proposal. (Brunner, Burghardt, Cloues, McCoy, Woods)

WINTER STORM IMPACTS AT WHISKEYTOWN: Division staff helped assess watersheds in Whiskeytown NRA that underwent significant changes resulting from the "New Year's" storm. The storm delivered 19 inches of rain in two days on already saturated watershed conditions. Above about 4500 ft. elevation, rapid snow melt exacerbated the effects of the rain event. The park wanted two questions answered: (1) what

caused the changes, and (2) is additional failure imminent. In the Paige-Boulder and Brandy Creek drainages, the two that experienced changes, small-scale debris flows, originating as fill failures on timber skid-roads, scoured basin colluvial fills. These debris flows combined with main-stem flood flows and then converted to what is referred to as a "debris torrent." The debris torrents scoured the main stem channels all the way to their confluence with either Whiskeytown Lake or Clear Creek; virtually all riparian vegetation was removed and an estimated 200,000 to 500,000 cubic yards of coarse sediment was delivered to both the lake and creek. Three bridges were washed out, cutting off access to the NEED Camp and significantly altering the beach at Brandy Creek. In comparison, the Clear Creek drainage (about the size of Brandy Creek) did not experience debris flows or torrents and overall flood effects were minimal. The probability of further failure in the recent debris flow areas is low. An additional site, a "debris avalanche" immediately below Clair Hill Dam, did not experience any notable instability during the storm. Initial concern that a massive failure below the dam could temporarily block Clear Creek, with subsequent rapid breakout and downstream flooding, was unwarranted. An estimated 10-15 or more years has passed since any significant mass movement at this site. Further studies recommended include a thorough inventory of timber and mining related roads and an assessment of much larger debris flow deposits that were not influenced by this storm (Steensen).

MOJAVE NATIONAL PRESERVE GETS NEW PARK GEOLOGIST: Division staff spent a week in Mojave National Preserve training and orienting the new park geologist, Andy Leszykowski. The Division has been providing Mojave with mining administration assistance, validity examinations, and mine compliance inspections since the preserve was created in October 1994. Andy has over 22 years of mineral-related geologic experience with the Bureau of Mines and spent the last 12 months as Assistant Chief of Interpretation for Crater Lake N.P. In February, we observed the following during compliance inspections of 17 active and inactive mine sites in the Preserve:

- * Evidence of overflowing cyanide pond at the Morningstar Mine;
 - * Indications of unauthorized volcanic cinder removal at the Aiken Cinder Mine and unauthorized iron ore removal at the Vulcan Mine;
 - * Storage of diesel fuel without secondary containment at Soda Lakes site;
 - * Hundreds of acres of unreclaimed roads, extraction areas and processing facilities; and
 - * Thousands of tons of abandoned equipment, buildings and junk.
- No one said it would be easy, Andy, but we're glad you're there.
(Ziegenbein)

DIVISION NEWS

PARK ROCKS IN CYBERSPACE: The Division is developing a Park Geology website at <http://www.aqd.nps.gov/grd/> The site will provide park geology information and links, information about NPS minerals and geology programs, geology vacancy and volunteer opportunities, and information for researchers and educators. A computer assistant from the Colorado School of Mines is working with staff and several parks to develop geology web pages and templates. If you would like to contribute ideas or material, please contact jim_f._wood@nps.gov.