

# News Release

U.S. Department of the Interior / Bureau of Land Management, Idaho Falls District  
U.S. Department of Agriculture / U.S. Forest Service, Caribou-Targhee National Forest  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Agencies Sign Record of Decision for the Smoky Canyon Mine, Panels F&G Expansion**

**Idaho Falls, Idaho:** The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Idaho Falls District and the Caribou-Targhee National Forest will each release a Record of Decision (ROD) on Tuesday, June 10, 2008 for the expansion of the Smoky Canyon Mine, Panels F & G.

The RODs authorize the J.R. Simplot Company's proposal to extend current open pit phosphate mining operations at Smoky Canyon Mine south into two existing federal phosphate leases (Manning Creek–Panel F and Deer Creek–Panel G). The leases are administered by BLM's Pocatello Field Office and are located on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. The proposed extension of mining operations will include modification (enlargement) of the Panel F lease and approval of a mine plan by the BLM. The RODs also authorize roads and utilities on National Forest System land outside the lease boundaries that are needed for mining operations.

“Both the BLM and Forest Service have considered the resources at stake and have carefully weighed the analysis and public comments,” BLM Idaho Falls District Manager Joe Kraayenbrink said. “The FEIS and this decision incorporate state of the art mitigation, Best Management Practices (BMPs) and thorough analysis.”

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was released to the public on October 17, 2007 for a 30-day availability period which was extended for an additional 30-days. Over 47,000 comments were received. The FEIS was prepared in cooperation

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with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and in consultation with numerous other state and federal agencies. The agencies have considered comments that were received regarding the FEIS and incorporated those comments in the decisions.

“The level of public interest with this project is unprecedented for the phosphate patch,” stated Larry Timchak, Forest Supervisor for the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. “As decision makers, we need to balance the public concerns with the laws and regulations that govern our management to reach a decision that provides for future phosphate mining in an environmentally sound and legal manner. I believe we have done that.”

The agencies’ decisions include the following major components:

- They approve mining in the leased areas, including Simplot’s proposed road to Panel F.
- They approve the West Haul/Access Road to Panel G, which would bypass private lands. This will allow for mine operations, but would keep most impacts further away from the populated areas in the Crow Creek Valley.
- They also require Simplot to implement an engineered cover system to prevent precipitation from percolating through selenium-laden waste rock and into groundwater sources. Simplot would also implement a test cover prior to installation of the cover on Panel F.
- They require the mine’s electrical line to be located in the road right of way, rather than going overland as was originally proposed.
- They require Simplot to implement a stringent monitoring program including monitoring the performance of the engineered cover system, surface water quality ground water quality, and fisheries habitat, populations, and contaminant concentrations.

Surface disturbance would total about 1, 449 acres.

Much of the operations will take place in Inventoried Roadless Areas of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. The roadless area attributes that will be affected have been fully considered in the decision making process. Both the BLM and Forest Service authorizations are in compliance with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

There are water quality problems associated with historic phosphate mining in Southeast Idaho that have caused impacts to various aquatic resources including fisheries. Protection of the ground water and surface water resources is one of the primary concerns of the agencies. BLM, USFS and IDEQ have expended a great deal of effort in conducting state-of-the-art analysis of water quality impacts in the FEIS. The analysis in the FEIS indicates that the impacts from the project will be in compliance with all applicable State and Federal water quality standards, including selenium.

Because each agency operates under different authorities, the BLM and Forest Service have each issued a separate ROD. The appeal period for the Forest Service, which is 45-days, opens after a legal notice of the decision is published in the Idaho State Journal which will be Friday, June 13, 2008. The BLM decisions regarding on-lease mining operations are the final administrative determination of the Department of Interior and are not subject to appeal. More detailed information regarding the appeal processes is contained in each respective ROD.

For a copy of the ROD or more information about the Smoky Canyon Mine EIS process, log on to [http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/fo/pocatello/planning/smoky\\_canyon\\_mine.html](http://www.blm.gov/id/st/en/fo/pocatello/planning/smoky_canyon_mine.html) or <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/caribou-targhee/phosphate> or contact the BLM Pocatello Field Office/Caribou-Targhee National Forest Mineral Branch at 208-478-6340 or 208-236-7500.