

(4) *Letter of authorization* means a letter signed by the Area Ranger, or his designee, authorizing an operator to conduct operations as approved in the operating plan.

(5) *Mineral resources* means all locatable minerals.

(6) *Operator* means a person conducting or proposing to conduct operations.

(7) *Operations* means all functions works, and activities in connection with exploration, development, mining or processing of mineral resources and all uses reasonably incident thereto, including roads and other means of access on lands, regardless of whether said operations take place on or off mining claims.

(8) *Operating plan* means a written instrument describing proposed operations on Federal lands and containing such information as required by § 292.18.

(9) *Person* means any individual, partnership, association, corporation, or other legal entity.

(10) *Substantial impairment* means that level of disturbance of the values of the SNRA which is incompatible with the standards of the General Management Plan. The proposed activities will be evaluated as to:

- (i) The period of impact,
- (ii) The area affected, and
- (iii) The importance of the impact on the SNRA values.

(11) *Unpatented mining claims* means any mining claim or millsite claim located prior to August 22, 1972, pursuant to the Mining Law of 1872, but not patented.

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§ 292.18 Mineral resources.

(a) *Occupancy*. No unpatented mining claim may be used or occupied, except as otherwise permitted for any purpose other than exploration, mining, or processing operations and uses reasonably incident thereto.

(b) *Letter of authorization*. A letter of authorization with the posting of an appropriate bond is required prior to conducting operations in the SNRA.

(c) *Operating plan*. A proposed operating plan must be filed with the Area Ranger prior to conducting any operations and prior to construction, recon-

struction, improvement or maintenance of roads and trails, bridges, or other facilities for access within the SNRA; provided, that an operating plan is not required for—

(1) Operations which only involve vehicular travel on existing roads open to public use;

(2) Marking and/or reestablishing claims corners;

(3) Sampling and exploration work which will not cause significant damage to surface resources and will not involve the removal of more than 100 pounds of material for analysis and study, provided the Area Ranger has prior notice of such activities; or

(4) The evaluation and study of existing underground mine workings not involving surface disturbances.

(d) *Operating plan—requirements*. Each operating plan shall include:

(1) The names and mailing addresses of operators and their agents, along with a statement of ownership and/or authorization under which the operation is to be conducted, and including a copy of the location notice(s), proof of assessment labor, and quit claim deeds if ownership has changed within the assessment year.

(2) A map or sketch showing information sufficient to locate the proposed area of operations on the ground, existing and/or proposed roads or access routes to be used in connection with the operations and the approximate location and size of areas where surface resources will be disturbed.

(3) Information describing the nature of operations proposed and how they will be conducted, the type and standard of existing and proposed roads or access routes, the means of transportation to be used, the period during which the proposed operations will take place, and measures to be taken for protecting the values of the SNRA and reclaiming the lands.

(e) *Operating plan—approval*. (1) The Area Ranger shall promptly acknowledge receipt of any operating plan to the operator. The Area Ranger shall review the environmental effects and conduct a technical examination of each proposed operating plan.

The technical examination shall identify the resources and the land uses in

the area of operations. The Area Ranger shall use the current General Management Plan of the SNRA and the Final Environmental Statement as guides in determining whether the proposed operations may result in substantial impairment of the values of the SNRA. In his review, the Area Ranger may solicit comments from the general public and/or other government agencies in analysis of environmental effects. In his review, the Area Ranger will consider the compatibility of the proposed operating plan with the Act and the General Management Plan. The Area Ranger may not approve an operating plan for an identical claimed area to more than one operator.

(2) Within 30 working days of receipt of a proposed operating plan, the Area Ranger shall take one of the following actions:

(i) Notify the operator that the operating plan has been approved as submitted; or,

(ii) Notify the operator that the operating plan has been approved as subject to the operator accepting the changes or conditions deemed necessary by the Area Ranger; or,

(iii) Notify the operator that more time is necessary to review the plan because of the need to prepare an environmental impact statement, or conduct a cultural resource survey, or other stated reasons; in such cases, the operator will be notified of the approximate time needed to complete the review; or,

(iv) Notify the operator of an apparent conflict of ownership and that additional proof of ownership is required; or,

(v) Notify the operator that the operating plan as submitted is inadequate to support any conclusion as to substantial impairment, and that additional information will be required; or,

(vi) Notify the operator that the operating plan is not approved since such operations as specified in the plan would create substantial impairment.

(f) *Operating plans—suspension, revocation, or modification.* The authorized officer may suspend or revoke authorization to operate in whole or in part where such operations are causing substantial impairment which cannot be mitigated. At any time during oper-

ations under an approved operating plan, the operator may be required to modify the operating plan to minimize or avoid substantial impairment of the values of the SNRA.

(g) *Bond requirements.* (1) An operator shall furnish a bond, in the amount determined by the Area Ranger to be appropriate for reclamation of the disturbed surface area, prior to the commencement of operations. In lieu of a bond, the operator may deposit into a Federal depository, as directed by the Forest Service, cash in an amount equal to the required dollar amount of the bond or negotiable securities of the United States having market value at the time of deposit or not less than the required dollar amount of the bond.

(2) When the reclamation of the project, or portions thereof, has been completed, the operator will notify the Area Ranger who will examine the area to determine whether the reclamation is acceptable. When the Area Ranger has accepted as completed any portion of the reclamation, he shall reduce proportionately the amount of bond thereafter to be required with respect to the remaining reclamation. However, the operator will not be released from liability under the bond for the amount which may be necessary to revegetate each planting area for a minimum period of at least 5 years after the first efforts at revegetation if those initial efforts are unsuccessful.

(3) If the Area Ranger determines that revegetation is likely to occur before the expiration of such minimum period, he may release the operator from the extended liability under the bond for revegetation of planting area.

(h) *Access.* The operator shall permit free and unrestricted public access to and through lands included within an unpatented mining claim for all lawful and proper purposes. In areas where such access would unduly interfere with authorized operations or would constitute a hazard to public health and safety, public use may be restricted with prior approval of the Area Ranger.

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