



RED CARPET

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THE Durango WEEKEND EDITION HERALD

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LA PLATA MOUNTAINS



13 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT MINING EXPLORATION

Metallic Minerals plans to resume drilling as soon as this summer

BY JESSIE BOWMAN
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Metallic Minerals, a Canadian-based mineral exploration company, has been investigating portions of the La Plata Mountains in both Montezuma and La Plata counties as a potential mining district since 2019.

Preliminary exploration and research conducted by the company suggest the mountains may contain large deposits of copper and other critical minerals.

The company plans to conduct additional exploratory drilling at several locations to better define the size, continuity and quality of the underground mineral resource. The work is intended to help determine whether the mineralization could someday support a large-scale underground mining operation.

Metallic Minerals has plans to drill more exploratory holes in the La Plata Mountains this year, to see what minerals are underground, using helicopters, temporary drill pads and water systems to operate in steep alpine terrain.

The complexity of the project – and the uncertainty surrounding its future – has made it difficult for many residents to understand exactly what is happening in the mountains and what could eventually come next.

Here are some of the key issues known about the project:



1. The project is exploratory drilling – not a full-scale mine (yet)

The proposal is for exploratory mineral drilling over a hard 12-month period. The project involves “core drilling,” a process where cylindrical rock samples are removed from underground and analyzed for mineral content.

Core drilling is intended to help geologists better understand:

- ▶ How large the mineralized system may be.
- ▶ How deep it extends.
- ▶ Whether mineralization is continuous.
- ▶ Whether the deposit could support future mining.

Core drilling does not mean a mine is imminent. However, it is generally conducted once companies believe there is enough evidence to justify a more advanced stage of exploration.

2. The operation would use roughly 125,000 gallons of water

The project is estimated to use 125,000 gallons of water, according to the updated plan of operations submitted to the U.S. Forest Service for approval in April.

In Durango, a single family uses an average of 65,000 gallons of water a year. About 125,000 gallons of water would fill nearly 1 million plastic water bottles (16.9 oz.).

The water is primarily used as part of the drilling process itself – essentially to cool the drill bit, carry rock cuttings out of the hole and keep the drilling system functioning.

Metallic Minerals proposes purchasing municipal water, trucking it up to the mining site, and delivering it to where it is needed through a sprawling temporary water-delivery network. Diesel-powered pumps and roughly 25,000 feet of temporary hose lines would move water uphill through relay stations to the drill pads.



3. Helicopters would play a major role in the operation

Large portions of the exploration depend on helicopter support, and drilling will include daily helicopter use, according to the most recent version of the company’s project proposal.

Metallic Minerals says the terrain is so steep and remote that temporary engineered timber platforms and helicopter-supported drilling are necessary at several sites.

Helicopters would be used to: transport crews, sling fuel tanks, move drilling equipment, transport lumber for timber pads, move pumps and hoses, deliver portable toilets, inspect waterlines, and as support in case of an emergency response.

The proposal requests authorization for four helicopter landing zones across National Forest lands, but the landing zones would be temporary structures that are able to be deconstructed after drilling ends.

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Phoenix Recycling approved to expand

Owner: Wood, other biodegradable waste will be processed

BY ELIZABETH POND
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Durango’s Phoenix Recycling has been granted a permit by La Plata County to build a combined wood waste recovery yard and compost facility on County Road 307.

“In a perfect world, we hope to address the problem of highly biodegradable materials going into the landfill and producing methane with the increased desire in the local community to mitigate forest fire risk,” Phoenix Recycling owner Mark Thompson said.

Thompson said he hopes to break ground on the roughly 15-acre development, which will be located across the street from Williams Ignacio Natural Gas Plant, some time next year, although dates are not yet finalized. He anticipates the project costing between \$1 and \$2 million, and plans are in the works to hire several additional employees to help operate the facility.

The county permitting process took about three years, Thompson said, and ongoing state-level recycling management changes are expected to continue to consume time and attention as the planning and construction process moves forward.

The permit allows for a wide range of biodegradable materials to be composted, including biosolids; biodegradable plastic packaging; biodegradable wood fibers; animal carcasses and food and food processing waste.

Thompson said the goal with the facility is to provide the community with better and more accessible long-term options than landfilling when it comes to discarding their biodegradable waste.

The facility will join a small number of similar operations currently serving the La Plata County area.

Table to Farm Compost, which focuses on food waste, has operated since 2016, and the Bayfield Transfer Station on County Road 223 also accepts compost waste – specifically pine needles, branches and pinecones – and grounds the material into free mulch

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