



## Forest Service News Release

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### **Bitterroot National Forest Responds to Media Reports on Sheep Creek Mineral Exploration**

**Hamilton, MT, March 15** — Last week, several media outlets reported stories on U.S. Critical Materials and U.S. Critical Metals Corp., and its Sheep Creek lode claims on the West Fork Ranger District. The articles included claims by the companies that the site contains the highest-grade rare earth deposits in the United States.

Today, Dan Pliley, West Fork District Ranger, released the following statement regarding Rare Earth Element (REE) Exploration in the Sheep Creek area. “The Bitterroot National Forest has not received a draft Plan of Operations for any exploration drilling or a proposal to develop a mine in the Sheep Creek Area. If the Forest Service receives a plan, we will review the plan, and if warranted, will take the proposal through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The NEPA process would include the opportunity for public notification and comment and ensure compliance with applicable environmental laws and regulations before moving forward with the project.”

The historic Sheep Creek Columbite Deposit Mine Site is located in the southwestern corner of Montana in Ravalli County, in the headwaters of the West Fork of the Bitterroot River. The area is approximately 38 miles south of Darby. Deposits were discovered in the area in 1953 and have been studied and sampled since the early 1960s.

Last October, U.S. Critical Materials and U.S. Critical Metals Corp., submitted a Notice of Intent (NOI) to conduct exploration activities within their Sheep Creek registered lode claims using hand tools for sampling and geologic mapping. Exploration activities in 2022, included soil sampling, stream sediment sampling, rock chip sampling, and mapping of historic mine adits and geophysical surveying. The NOI was approved for the 2022 field season and to date, the Forest Service has not received a proposal to conduct mineral exploration in 2023.

By law, processing locatable minerals plans is nondiscretionary for the Forest Service. Miners have possessory rights associated with mining claims which authorizes the miner the right to use the surface for mining purposes including use and occupancy necessary for processing. All miners are subject to 36 CFR 228 Subpart A including requirements to submit a plan of operations and post a reclamation bond.

Prior to conducting any exploratory drilling, the companies would also need to obtain an Exploration License from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

For more information, contact Dan Piley, West Fork District Ranger at (406) 821-3269. Stay in touch with us through [www.facebook.com/DiscoverTheBitterroot](http://www.facebook.com/DiscoverTheBitterroot).

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