



## Forest Service News Release

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### Notice of Intent to Conduct Mineral Exploration

**Hamilton, MT, May 30, 2023** —The Bitterroot National has received a Notice of Intent (NOI) to conduct mineral exploration from U.S. Critical Materials and U.S. Critical Metals Corp. within their registered lode claims in the Sheep Creek location on the West Fork Ranger District for the 2023 field season.

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.

Submission of a NOI for a proposed mining operation is required in order to provide the Forest Service district ranger with sufficient information to determine if the level of proposed activity will require a plan of operations.

If the Forest Service authorized officer determines NOI operations will likely cause or are causing significant resource disturbances, the operator must submit a proposed plan of operations for approval. Operations cannot continue until a plan of operations is approved. Submission of a plan of operations then triggers NEPA and other applicable requirements.

U.S. Critical Materials and U.S. Critical Metals Corp.'s recently submitted Notice of Intent (NOI) for 2023 is a continuation of work that was proposed in their previous NOI from 2022. A copy of this NOI is posted on our website at [www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot](http://www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot) under 'Quick Links'. Proposed exploration activities include continued sampling using hand tools, soil and stream sediment sampling, rock chip sampling, mapping and sampling of adits, ground geophysical surveys, and helicopter or drone-supported geophysical surveys. Close out for the 2023 season is expected to be on or before October 20, 2023.

The NOI was accepted for the 2023 operating season which determined that a plan of operations is not required at this time.

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.

For more information, contact Dan Pliley, 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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