

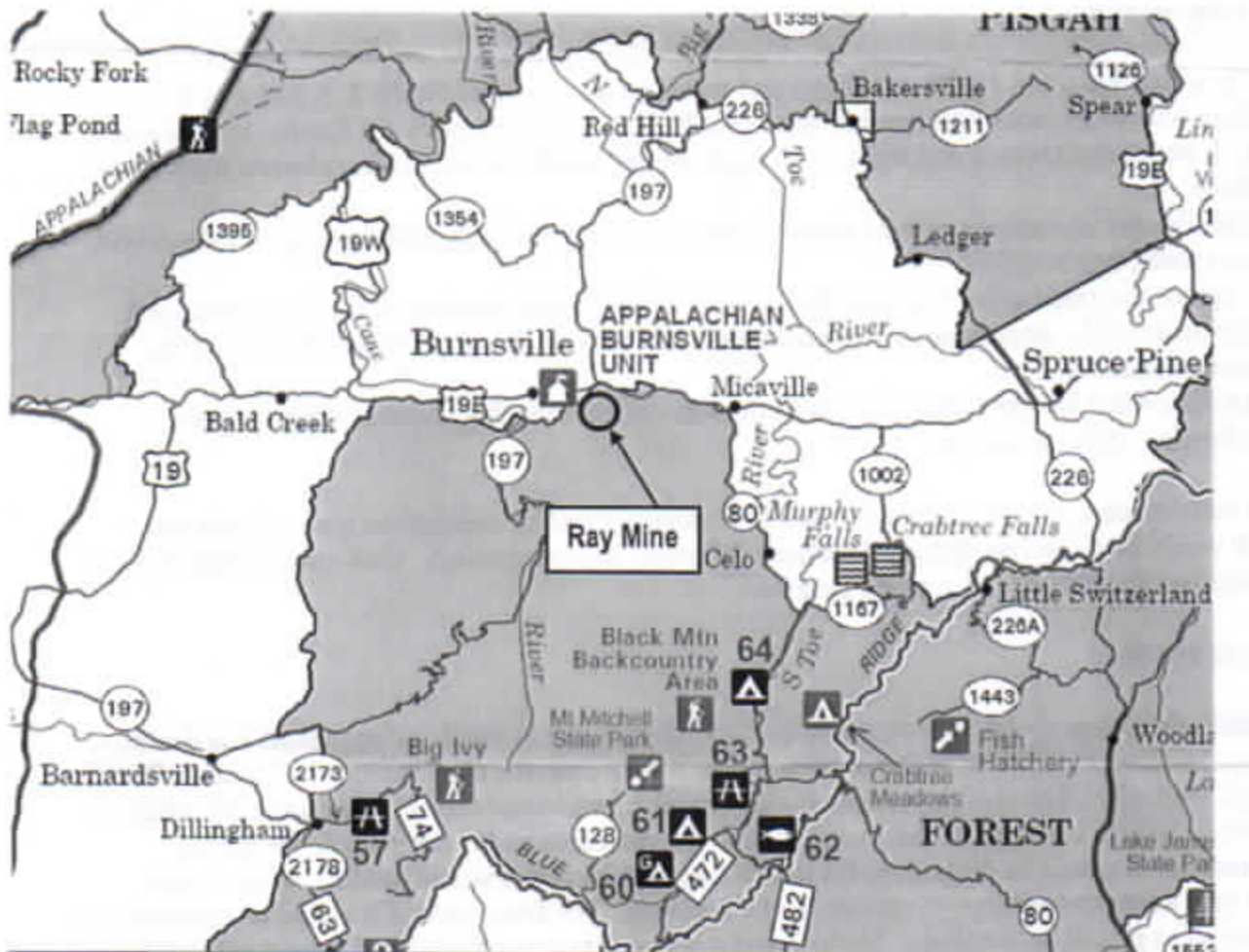


File Code: 1900

Date: February 18, 2011

Dear Interested Members of the Public:

The Appalachian Ranger District, Pisgah National Forest is proposing to close four existing shafts of the Ray Mine. The mine is located about three miles southeast of Burnsville, North Carolina in Yancey County (see General Vicinity Map).



Ray Mine - General Vicinity Map

Background

The property in and around the Ray Mines was acquired by the USDA Forest Service in the 1960s. According to an article by Mike Streeter: *The Ray mine was closed and reopened many times throughout the years until the Wray mining company abandoned it as unprofitable in May 1944*



after the U.S. Geological Survey mapped the mine as part of the Strategic Minerals Investigation Program. What remain today in the heavily forested area of Yancey County are extensive spoil piles that extend down a steep slope from the crest of a divide to an unnamed creek that flows over and under jagged pegmatite rocks. The spoils are popular for "rock hounding" numerous minerals including the accessory minerals aquamarine, beryl, and garnet, and trace minerals including fluorite, kyanite, and pyrite. At times during the year, up to a dozen or more vehicles park on and near the small parking area on National Forest System lands (NFS) to access the area; however, most individuals park on private lands. In April 2010, the District defined a specific area for rock hounding that is north of the un-named tributary stream to Bolens Creek mentioned in Mr. Streeter's account (see Project Map). Rock hounding outside of this defined area is not allowed.

Proposal

The proposal is to:

- Close existing Shaft 1 with metal bars and metal grates and close Shafts 2, 3, and 4 by filling them with large rocks/boulders and trees (see Project Map). Remove old fencing around Shafts 1, 3, and 4, and remove and replace old fence around Shaft 2 while placing closure signs on the fence.
- Stabilize the un-named tributary stream between Shafts 1 and 2 by placing large woody debris, root wads, and boulders.
- Upgrade the existing parking area on National Forest System lands to allow for material and equipment to be stored during implementation and provide for up to 10 vehicles following implementation.
- Replace water bars and wing ditches on the non-system road that accesses the project area following implementation.

In all activity areas, heavy equipment would be necessary and an appropriate rye seed mix and mulch would be placed on disturbed surfaces following implementation. Coir matting may be used on disturbed streambanks as funding permits.

Purpose and Need

Currently these four shafts pose an immediate and serious risk to public safety. Shaft 1 is deceptive to casual visitors as it has an apparent "bottom" to it; however, the shaft extends horizontally before it drops vertically. The shaft is suitable for bats to hibernate in and the old fence around it would be removed. Shaft 2 is a vertical shaft very close to the spoil area and is not suitable for bats to hibernate in. It would be difficult to fill it with large boulders and would need to be filled with trees, root wads, and as large of rock as can be accessed. The fence around it would be replaced and closure signs placed on the fence. Shafts 3 and 4 are similar to each other and are not suitable for bats to hibernate in. Both shafts would both be closed with large boulders and rocks and the old fence around them would be removed. Shaft 4 currently has deep water pooled up within it.

There is a need to close these four shafts to ensure public safety is maintained while ensuring bats can access Shaft 1. Forest Service Manual 6700 (Safety and Health Program) states the following objective at 6702: *The objective of the Forest Service safety and health program is to ensure adequate protection for Forest Service employees and property, Human Resource Program participants, and the visiting public.* (emphasis added).

Forest Plan Direction

Management opportunities were identified through a comparison of existing and desired conditions which could move this landscape toward a desired future condition. The desired future condition for a given resource was determined by examination of the Forest-wide and Management Area (MA) 4C General Direction and Standards in the Land and Resource Management Plan, Amendment 5, for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests (USDA March 1994 and here after referred to as Forest Plan). The Forest Plan also states to: *Emphasize the protection of all developed stream channels. Protect the integrity of intermittent and ephemeral stream channels, including their banks and beds. [P]revent visible sediment from reaching perennial and intermittent stream channels and perennial water bodies in accordance with NC Forest Practice Guidelines Related to Water Quality.* (Forest Plan, page III-40).

The project area is within MA 4 and the Forest Plan describes an objective of MA 4 as lands: *[m]anaged to provide high levels of scenic quality, many opportunities for nonmotorized recreational uses and habitat for animals which prefer a predominance of older vegetation and limited disturbance.* (Forest Plan, page III-77).

I expect to complete the environmental analysis using 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 220.6(e)(6) *Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction.* If you have questions or concerns about this proposal, please contact David McFee, Project Leader; Michael Hutchins, Team Leader; or me at (828) 682-6146. To ensure your comments are adequately analyzed and considered, please submit them by **March 21, 2011**. Comments may be mailed to: Appalachian Ranger District, ATTN: District Ranger, P.O. Box 128, Burnsville, North Carolina 28714; e-mailed to: comments-southern-north-carolina-pisgah-appalachian@fs.fed.us; or faxed to (828) 682-9179. I appreciate your interest in management of the Pisgah National Forest.

Sincerely,



TINA R. TILLEY
District Ranger

Enclosure

Ray Mine Shafts Closure - Project Map

