

Sheep Creek Mine update 2024:

In October 2022 US Critical Materials Corp <https://uscriticalmaterials.com/> added 169 new claims to a block of old claims for a combined total of 4,500 acres in a new project aimed at mining rare earth elements (REEs) at the head of the Bitterroot River. Since then USCM has explored their claims with detailed geological and geophysical mapping, opening a few old adits (underground tunnels), as well as assay sampling of rock, soil and stream sediment. Because these activities are not considered “ground disturbance” by permitting agencies (BNF and MTDEQ) the Company was allowed to proceed with simple Notice of Intent (NOI) permits that do not entail assessments of environmental damage or any public involvement process.

The Company has documented some very high REE assay results and has produced many press releases hyping the project, sometimes with misinformation like, “The US Critical Materials deposit in Montana has sufficient rare earths and gallium to provide the world with the critical elements it needs to help meet demand well into the future”. In fact they do not know if there is “sufficient” high grade ore on their property beyond what can be seen on surface and in the relatively small adits, which is clearly not sufficient. Drilling will be necessary to determine the volume of ore. The Company has created much mistrust with misleading statements and hyperbolic sales pitches.

Also creating mistrust, the company has announced imminent exploration drilling a couple times over the years only to fail to even submit plans to the BNF and Montana DEQ for the necessary exploration permits. This is good news, but to stay viable and ground truth their hype much longer they will need to drill. They recently told a reporter they expect to file a Plan of Operation (PoO) with the US Forest Service in the second quarter of 2025 . We can't assume their statement is just more bunk, so we continue to prepare.

After the Company submits their exploration plan to the BNF and MTDEQ, those agencies will initiate a public process asking the public for “scoping issues”, i.e. what we, the public, would like to see in the way of analysis and mitigation of environmental threats preceding signing of exploration permits. It is very important that members of the public submit comments to demonstrate large scale opposition to the proposed Sheep Creek Mine.

The time allowed for public comment could be very short due to recent adoption of expedited permitting processes. Due to the possibility of a very short comment period some citizen groups have consolidated issues ahead of the official period and will refine that “Pre-scoping” document once specific plans in the PoO are revealed to the public. Our updated scoping comment document will be made available for public use. See current pre-scoping comments: <https://www.friendsofthebitterroot.net/pdf-sheep-creek-pre-scoping/>

One critical issue we have highlighted is the question about presence, or not, of asbestos in the rock at the mine site. This potentially deadly issue needs to be addressed before any “ground disturbing” activities take place. Permitting agencies should require USCM to pay for an independent analysis. It is well documented that a significant amount of the mineral actinolite is intimately associated with the minerals USCM would be targeting. Actinolite can be asbestiform in a class known as amphibole asbestos, which is even more toxic than the more usual type of asbestos. In 1960 it was first reported that Sheep creek actinolite “forms masses of radiating fibers surrounding other crystals”. Tremolite, closely related to actinolite, has killed hundreds of people in and around Libby is an amphibole asbestos. Dust containing amphibole asbestos can travel far and wide and is very difficult to ever clean up. Prevention is the only solution. Drilling exploration is dusty business. See: <https://missoulacurrent.com/viewpoint-mine-asbestos/>

What you can do now

If you haven't already, you may want to email West Fork Ranger Dan Pliley Daniel.pliley@usda.gov and ask to be put on the list of concerned citizens to be alerted when the Sheep Creek Exploration PoO is released, starting the public scoping comment period. You might want to offer some pre-scoping comments in your email. Finally, be ready to write comments when the PoO is released to the public and the official public comment period opens.

2024 USCM website post

US Critical Materials posted an article on their [website](#) saying they would be drilling this coming summer of 2024. When we asked the Forest Service,, they knew nothing about it. But after our conversation with the West Fork Ranger, the article was taken down. But we got a screenshot before they took it down. We expect a Plan of Operation for exploration drilling in April. We will keep you updated. Make sure you are on our mailing list.

Here is their destructive "exploration" plan:

Exploration Program and Plan of Operations in 2024

➤ Establish Access to Adit #2

Access into Sheep Creek Adit #1 and Adit #3 in 2023 allowed underground geologic mapping and sampling that greatly increased the understanding of carbonatite rare earth mineralization and host-rock structural geology. Based on historic maps, mineralization in Adit #2 is more extensive than in Adits #1 and #3 and access underground could further add to the understanding and predictive geology of the mineral system. It may be possible to open Adit #2 by hand with pick and shovel. If this is not possible, clearing the portal of the caved adit will require mechanized equipment and be part of and timed with the Plan of Operations.

➤ Claim Staking - Ground Acquisition

Reconnaissance stream sediment samples and soil samples suggest additional rare earth mineralization occurs beyond the boundaries of the current claim block. Increased competitor activity is anticipated for 2023 and these areas should be considered for acquisition. It is likely that claim staking will be an on-going activity throughout the 2024 field season as additional areas of mineralization are identified.

➤ Permitting

Permitting exploration activities for 2024 with government agencies is in progress and will be an evolving on-going process as different aspects of the program are initiated and as they expand in scope. Re-opening old forest roads and constructing new access roads, building drill-pads, and the impacts to forest well-being that could result from these activities will require review and permission by the US Forest Service in conjunction with the State of Montana Department of Environmental Quality. A formal Plan of Operations is being prepared for the Sheep Creek property by a group that specializes in permitting and they will continue as advisors throughout the permitting process.

➤ Drilling

Core drilling will be conducted from as many as ten sites with each site designed to accommodate multiple drill holes. Targets are selected based on grade of mineralization, strength of structure including continuity and width, as well as access requirements. First phase drilling will test a range of targets with follow-up drilling on the targets with the most favorable results. The drilling is designed to test the down-dip continuity of dikes and vein-form mineralization and the strategy will be to drill relatively shallow holes first to establish dips with deeper holes based on carbonatite intersections. Maximum depth penetration will be in the range of 500 to 700 feet. The number of drill sites and total drill footage is dependent on budget and timing of permits. It is anticipated that additional targets will be identified through further on the ground geologic work and by the airborne geophysical survey, and if timing permits, these targets could be incorporated into the 2024 drill program.

