



**USDA Forest Service  
Santa Fe National Forest**

**Comexico LLC Tererro Project Core Drilling  
June 25, 2019**

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**Comexico's Proposed Project**

- Since February 2019, representatives from Comexico have met with the Santa Fe National Forest (SFNF) to discuss their plan for mineral exploration on SFNF land. The company's website indicates Comexico is primarily interested in copper, zinc and gold.
- Comexico's project area is on the Jones Hill and Macho Canyon areas of the Pecos Ranger District in Santa Fe and San Miguel Counties south and west of Tererro, New Mexico (NM). The project area is within the Pecos River watershed in Indian Creek and Macho Canyon.
  - The project area is accessed from State Road 63 across land managed by NM Game and Fish and private property.
- Comexico has submitted two Notices of Intent (NOIs) under 36 CFR 228 to the SFNF:
  - The April 2 NOI notified the Forest it would require access to several Forest Service roads which are closed to the public. District Ranger Steve Romero acknowledged the NOI on April 15.
  - The April 29 NOI notified the Forest the company would be conducting non-ground disturbing exploration. District Ranger Steve Romero acknowledged the NOI on May 17.
  - The SFNF included a list of measures to protect biological resources, including the Mexican spotted owl, a threatened species, in its acknowledgement of Comexico's NOIs. The project area includes designated critical habitat and a protected activity center (PAC) for the Mexican spotted owl, as well as habitat for peregrine falcon, Rio Grande cutthroat trout, bats, and Holy Ghost ipomopsis.
- On June 4, 2019, Comexico submitted a Plan of Operations for core drilling operations on up to 2.2 acres to both the SFNF and the NM Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department's Mining and Minerals Division.
  - The drill rig(s) would be truck-mounted and would stay on existing roads, although some drill sites might require levelling a pad and widening the roads.
  - The Plan identifies the location of 84 potential drill pads, although no more than 30 drill pads will be constructed. None of the drill pads would exceed 40 feet by 60 feet in size. It is possible that more than one drill hole could be drilled from a pad. The drill pads to be used will be determined after the geophysical data is collected and analyzed.
  - The drill rig would use a mud drilling system, which requires water. Comexico must obtain water rights through the NM State Engineer's Office or purchase water from existing water rights holders.
  - The proposed period of operation is October 1, 2019, through February 29, 2020, with reclamation occurring within 12 months after the completion of drilling.
- Comexico will need a state permit to proceed with the drilling Plan of Operations and is coordinating with the NM Mining and Minerals Division.
- Comexico will use the data it collects along with historical data about the area to determine if a mine is feasible. Today, there are several significant unknowns about this project, including:
  - The size of the ore body
  - The metal values within the ore body
  - Whether the mine would be open pit or underground
  - Whether the ore would be processed on site
  - Potential location(s) of the mine and processing facilities.

## Governing Laws and Regulations

- The Comexico operation is authorized under the General Mining Act of 1872 (as amended) and the 36 CFR 228 subpart A regulations. Under these regulations, the activities described in the Comexico NOIs are non-surface disturbing and therefore did not require NEPA analysis. A Plan of Operations requires NEPA analysis to disclose the impacts on resources. Environmental impacts will vary, depending on the scope of operations and the degree of disturbance to vegetation, soil, water, air or wildlife. The level of impacts will determine the appropriate level of NEPA required. While the SFNF can require Comexico to implement measures to protect resources, under the 1872 mining law (as amended) and general practice, the Forest does not have the authority to prohibit the exploration and development of the mineral resources.
- Other relevant laws:
  - Endangered Species Act. The project area is within critical habitat for the threatened Mexican spotted owl and near habitat for the endangered Holy Ghost ipomopsis.
    - Other species that may be impacted include the peregrine falcon, Rio Grande cutthroat trout and northern goshawk.
  - Archaeological Acts. This section of the Pecos Valley does not have a high number of identified cultural sites.
  - Clean Water Act. Protecting water sources from acid mine drainage will be a primary concern of local residents. The project area is in the Upper Pecos Watershed and less than 2 miles away from the Santa Fe Municipal Watershed.
  - Wilderness Act. The project area is adjacent to the Pecos Wilderness and extends into an area that is recommended for wilderness management in the new draft forest management plan. Although the Wilderness Act allows mining activities within wilderness, it also requires that those activities be conducted in “a manner compatible with the preservation of the wilderness environment.”
  - Much of the proposed project area is within the Thompson Peak Inventoried Roadless Area and therefore has special management requirements.