

3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 describes the existing natural and human environment that would potentially be affected by the Stibnite Gold Project (SGP). The natural and human environment is further divided into resources or resource uses - physical environment, biological resources, and social resources/environment. Each resource section includes a brief description of the geographic area potentially affected for a given resource (analysis area) and, as needed, includes the history, development, past disturbances, natural events, and interactions that have helped shape the current conditions (Affected Environment). Each resource section is organized as follows: a brief introduction and scope of analysis including a definition of the analysis area specific to the resource; relevant laws, policies, and plans regulating the resource; and existing conditions of the resource in the analysis area.

3.1.1 Scope of Analysis

For the purposes of this SGP Environmental Impact Statement, the term “SGP area” is defined to mean the entire area in which disturbance from the SGP components (i.e., the combined disturbance footprints of the mine site, access roads, utilities, and offsite facilities) for any alternatives would occur.

The SGP area is located in Valley County, Idaho, and the mine site is located in the upper East Fork South Fork Salmon River drainage. The mine site is approximately 44 air miles northeast of the City of Cascade and 10 air miles southeast of the community of Yellow Pine (**Figure 1.2-1**). Within the SGP area, which includes offsite infrastructure, under Alternative 1 approximately 2,566 acres are under United States Forest Service (Forest Service) jurisdiction (1,645 acres on Payette National Forest-administered lands and 921 acres on Boise National Forest-administered lands), 880 acres are private lands including lands managed by Midas Gold Idaho, Inc., 25 acres are administered by the Bureau of Reclamation, and 62 acres are administered by the State of Idaho. The mine life, including construction, operation, closure and reclamation, ranges between 20 to 25 years (depending on the alternative) not including additional years for monitoring.

The mine site is within terrain consisting of narrow valleys surrounded by steep mountains. Elevations along valley floors range from 6,000 to 6,600 feet above mean sea level. The surrounding mountains reach elevations over 8,500 feet above mean sea level. The main drainage basin at the mine site is the East Fork South Fork Salmon River. More detailed descriptions of the physical, biological, and social environments are included in the resource sections in the rest of this chapter.

Each resource section begins by identifying the spatial area of analysis (analysis area). The analysis area varies by resource or resource use, depending on the geographic extent of the resource or use and the extent of the potential effects of the SGP. In some cases, the analysis area is the SGP area and other cases, the analysis area may be larger or smaller than the SGP area, encompassing administrative or natural boundaries, because the potential effects on the resource can either extend beyond the SGP area boundary or may only occur in a smaller area such as the mine site.

3.1.2 Relevant Laws, Regulations, Policies, and Plans

Each resource section briefly summarizes applicable laws, regulations, policies and plans that pertain specifically to the resource being described and why each is relevant to the resource.

The 2003 Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, and the 2010 Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan are the Forest Service plans that provide guidance on National Forest System lands in the SGP area. The forest plans have both forest-wide management directions and more specific management area level directions such as Management Prescription Categories. These management areas are organized around a combination of watershed and administrative boundaries and are designed to tier to the forest-wide direction to help achieve forest-wide goals and desired conditions. A table of standards from both the Payette and Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans that have the potential for a forest plan amendment is included in **Appendix A**.

3.1.3 Existing Conditions

The existing conditions section for each resource describes the potentially affected resources (i.e., physical, biological, social and economic resources or resource uses) qualitatively and/or quantitatively, depending on the analysis requirements identified by the issues and indicators. Most existing conditions descriptions are divided into subcategories based on the main alternatives' components described in Chapter 2 (mine site, access roads, utilities, and offsite facilities).