LO
960005

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 6
1445 ROSS AVENUE, SUITE 1200
DALLAS, TX 75202-2733

March 8, 1996

Mr. John F. Peterson
Jemez District Ranger
Santa Fe National Forest
P.O. Box 150
Jemez Springs, New Mexico 87025

Dear Mr. Peterson:

In accordance with our responsibilities under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing NEPA, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6 office in Dallas, Texas, has completed its review of the U.S. Forest Service Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Copar Pumice Company's proposed El Cajete Mine, Jemez National Recreational Area, Santa Fe National Forest.

This DEIS analyzes the environmental effects of Copar Pumice Company's proposed action Alternatives 1; 1(a), and 2 which provide for variation in the mitigation and reclamation measures; and the no action alternative. Copar Pumice Company has proposed to surface mine 100,000 tons of pumice annually for 10 years at the 83.5 acre EL Cajete Mine. Mined pumice would be haul to the mill located at San Ysidro and Espanola, New Mexico. Waste pumice would be back filled and reshaped to mimic the characteristic landscape. Stockpiled top soil would be spread over the reshaped slopes and revegetated with native plants to reestablish the forest vegetation. Native species would be used for revegetation and reforestation in patterns that mimic the natural grasslands in the area. Prescribed ground cover and seeding would be included in the revegetation and reforestation effort.

Based upon the environmental analysis presented in the Draft Statement, we concur with the Forest Service analysis that for the mining activity, Alternative 1(a) or 2 would be the environmentally preferred plan of action. These plans differ from the company's preferred plan in that they provided for reclamation and mitigation features required to conserve soil productivity and reduce impacts to surface water, and speed recovery of the vegetation and habitat recovery. Native species would be used for revegetation and reforestation in patterns that mimic the natural grasslands in the area. According to the EIS, prescribed ground cover and seeding would be included in the revegetation and reforestation effort.

Recycled/Recyclable • Printed with Vegetable Oil Based Inks on 100% Recycled Paper (40% Postconsumer)

Alternative 2 repeats Alternative 1 and includes the same reclamation measures as provided for by alternative 1(A), but reduces the size of the mine from 83.5 to 58 acres to reduce the impact to scenery.

Based upon the Forest Service recommendations, the EPA rates your DEIS as "LO," i.e., EPA has "Lack of Objections" to the Forest Service's preferred alternative, Alternative 1(a) and would not object to the selection of Alternative 2. In view of the sensitivity of the area, we would agree that Alternative 1 is not the environmentally preferred choice for selection.

Our classification will be published in the Federal Register according to our responsibility under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, to inform the public of our views on proposed Federal actions.

We appreciate the opportunity to review the DEIS. We request that you send our office one copy of the Final EIS at the same time that it is sent to the Office of Federal Activities, (2251A), EPA, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20044.

Sincerely yours,

Michael P. Jansky, P.E.

Michael P. Jansky, P.E.
Regional Environmental
Review Coordinator