A SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT

For the

PROPOSED FRENCH GULCH STREAMBED REHABILITATION PROJECT
On the
MOUNT HAGGIN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
DEER LODGE COUNTY, MONTANA

Prepared for:

Big Hole Watershed Committee

And

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
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By

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INTRODUCTION

The Big Hole Watershed Committee and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Butte, Montana contracted with GCM Services, of Butte, Montana to supply additional, supplemental historic information on linear gravel pile features within the area of a proposed streambed rehabilitation project on French Gulch in Deer Lodge County. The purpose of the project is to restore the creek channel and create trout habitat. French Gulch is a tributary of the Big Hole River.

The subject of the research is a pair of linear gravel piles along the French Creek floodplain in Sections 1 and 2, T2N R12W. The linear gravel piles more or less parallel the recently replaced roadbed and the drainage channel. There has been extensive, well-documented placer mining activity, including dredging operations, on French Creek above this point. The features lie in the drainage bottom, an extensive riparian environment with rushes, willows and dogwood growing amid the flowing French Creek Channel, bogs, and beaver impoundments.

Figure 1 shows the location of historic selected cultural properties on the Deer Lodge National Forest 1:126,720-scale Forest Visitor Map and the USGS 7.5-minute topographic quadrangle, *Lincoln Gulch*, Montana (1962). Figure 2 is and aerial view of the area of investigation showing the linear dike features provided by Montana FWP. Figure 3 is an enlargement of a portion of the 1907 Plat of the Allen Gold Company's placer claims on French Creek. Figure 4 is a portion of the 1872 Master Title Plat for Township 2 North, Range 12 West showing the subject area. Figures 4-6 are photos of the linear gravel piles along the French Creek floodplain taken in 2014 and 2016.

The following sources were examined in an effort to identify the origin of the two linear structures: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) mineral survey plat files in the Butte Field Office; the BLM's General Land Office survey plat archives, found on the internet at: (https://www.glorecords.blm.gov/default.aspx); the William R. Allen Papers at the Montana Historical Society Archives; Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology vertical files, the library of Montana Tech, W.R. Allen's 1949 autobiography, The Chequemegon, as well as general mining references such as mining industry journals, state records of mine production and overviews of Montana mining camps, and, past reports by Newell (1980) and Ferguson (2008; 2013) on the local history of the French Creek area.

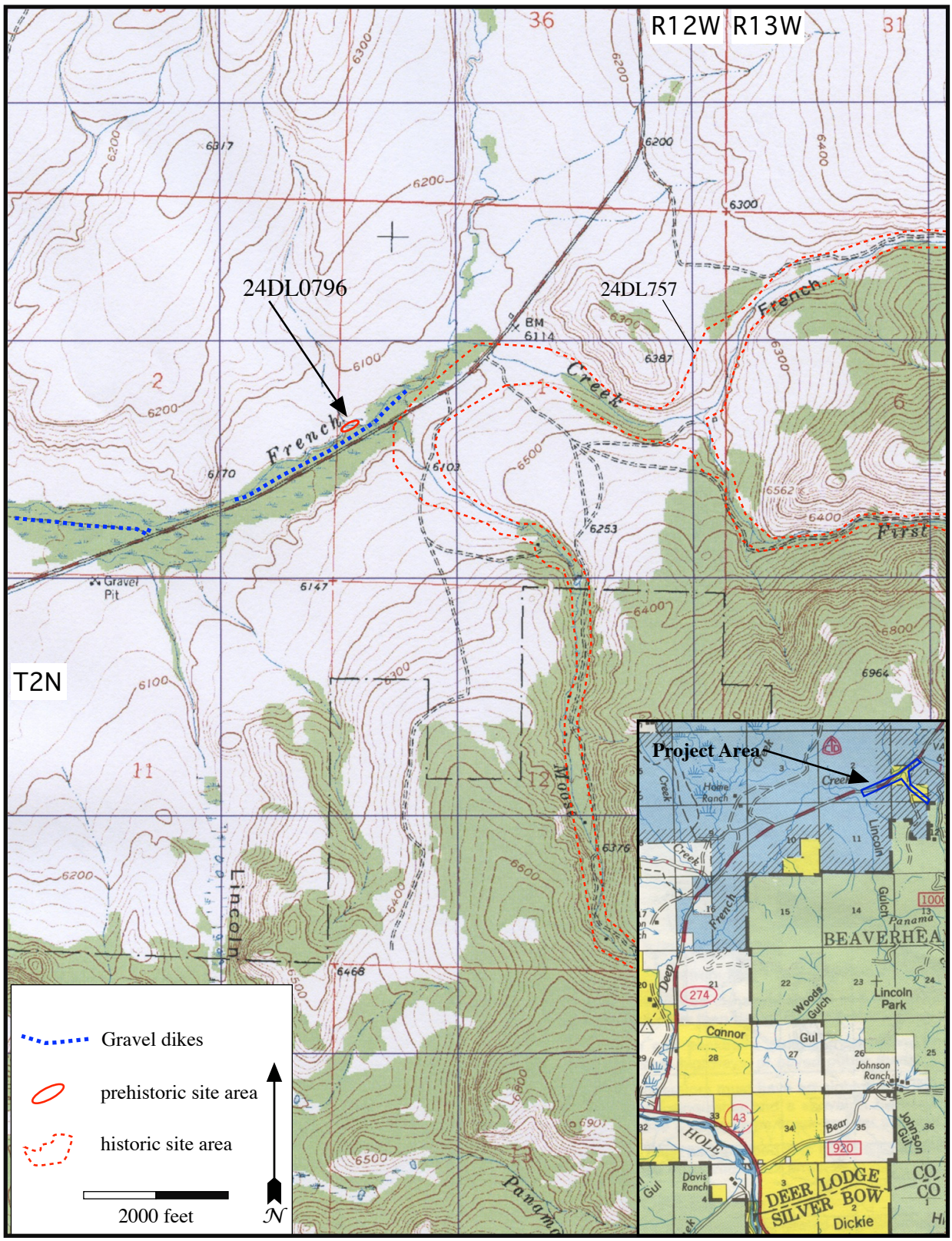

Figure 1. The location of historic selected cultural properties on the Deer Lodge National Forest 1:126,720-scale Forest Visitor Map and the USGS 7.5-minute topographic quadrangle, *Lincoln Gulch*, Montana (1962).

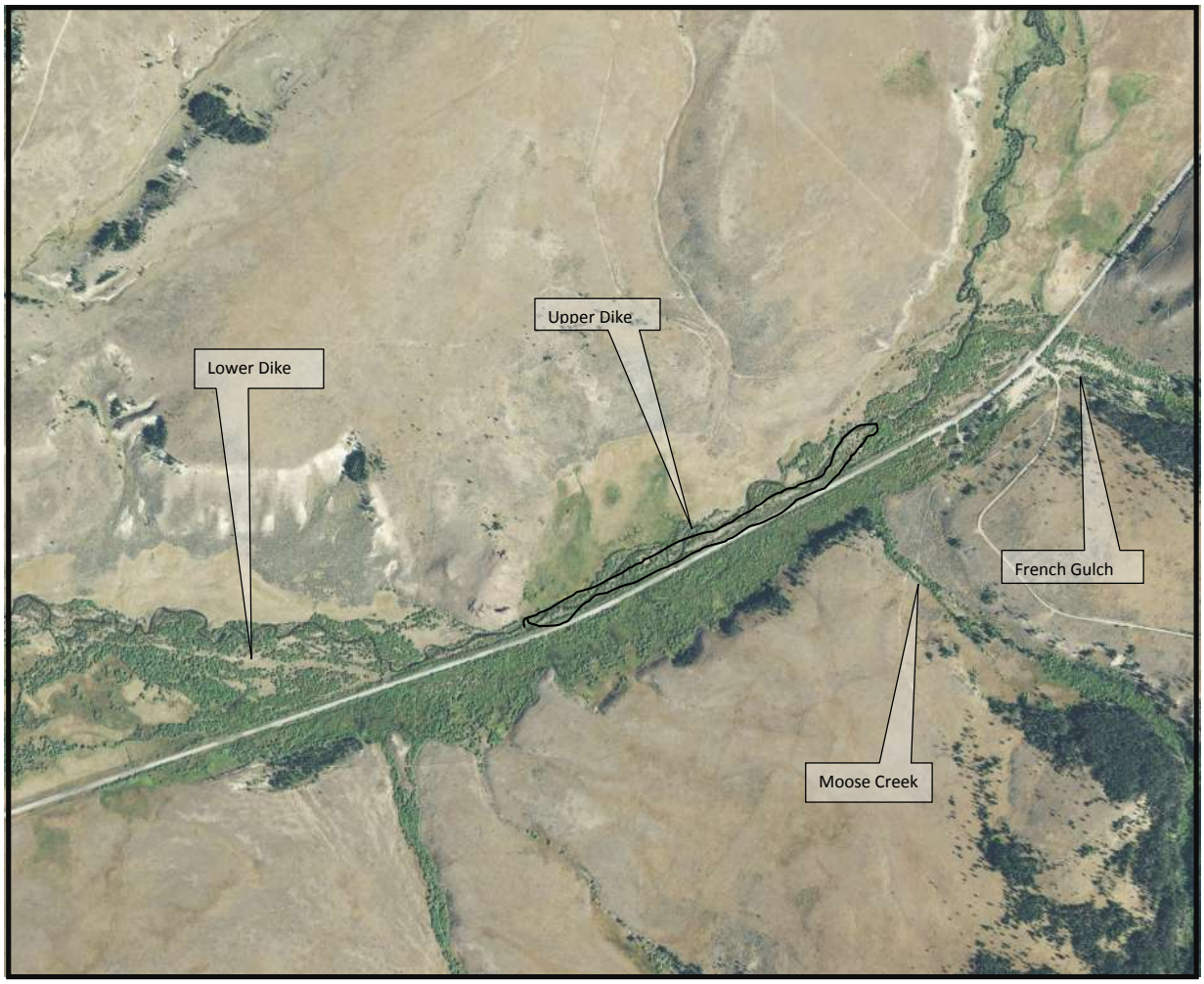

Figure 2. Aerial view of the area of investigation showing the linear dike features.

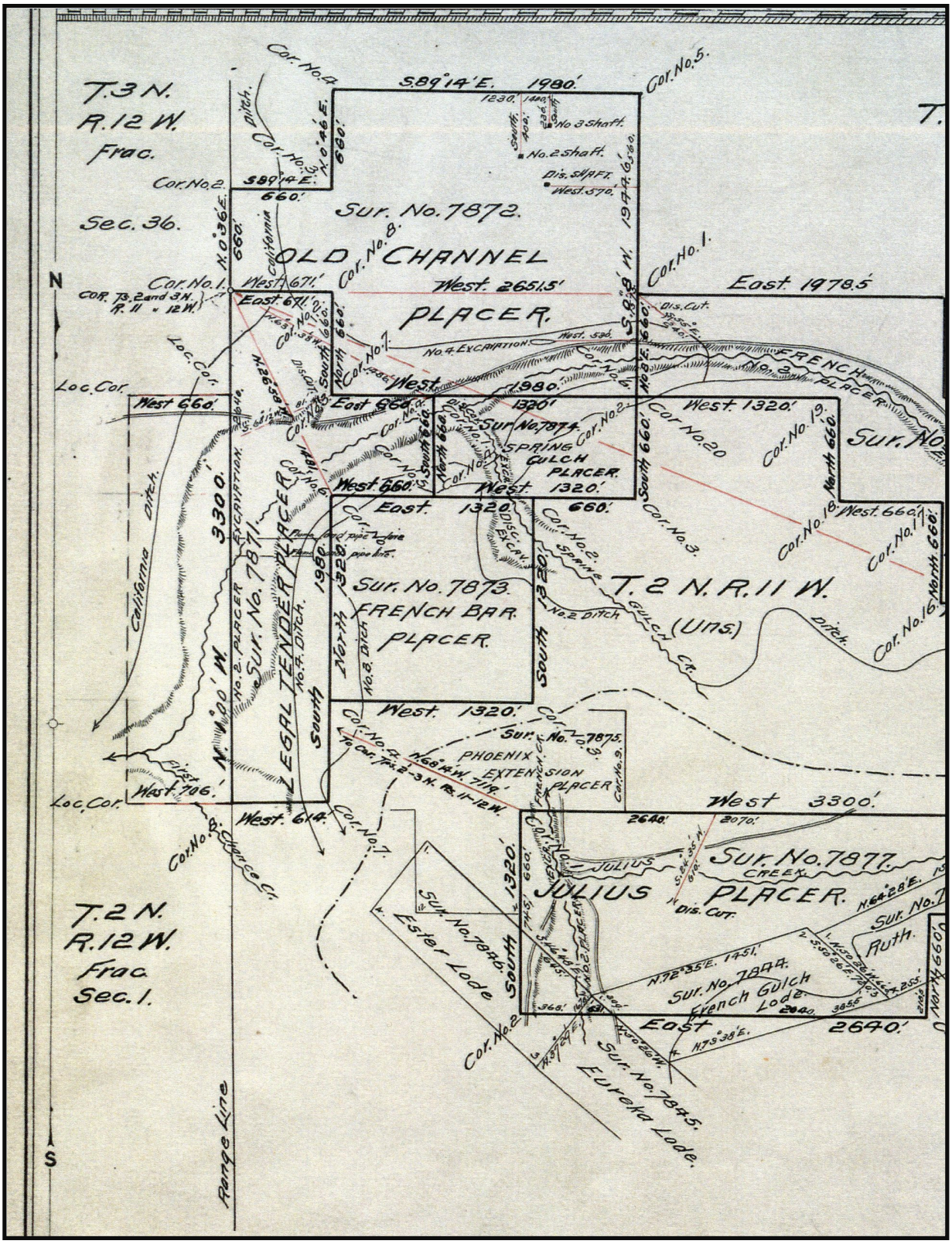

Figure 3. The 1907 plat of the Allen Gold Company's placer claims on French Creek.

Figure 4. The east bank of French Creek, which is comprised of washed gravels (NW SW Section 1, T2N R12E, Ferguson 2014 photo)

Figure 5. Washed placer gravels (NW SW Section 1, T2N R12E, Jim Olsen 2016 photo)

Figure 6. Washed placer gravels along French Creek viewing southwest, Jim Olsen 2016 photo)

French Gulch Mining District History

Two Frenchmen are credited with making the first placer gold discoveries in the area in 1863. French Gulch, as with many of the placer mining districts in Montana Territory, soon attracted a variety of itinerant prospectors. American, Spanish, German and Chinese, miners entered the Mount Haggin Area during these early years. The names given to creeks in the Area reflect this diverse ethnic influence--German Gulch, French Creek, American Creek.

The French Gulch Mining District included some of the more important mining properties in southwestern Montana. The district encompassed French Creek, California Creek, American Creek, Oregon Creek, and their minor tributaries. In the first four years since its discovery, the district yielded between $1,000,000 and $5,000,000 in gold nuggets and dust (WPA 1941).

In 1864, French Gulch held a roaring gold mining camp, similar to hundred of others throughout the West. Twenty placer mining claims were filed on French Creek in its first year. The "town" of Mountaineer City (a/k/a French Gulch) was located at the confluence of French Creek and First Change Creek (Section 1, T2N R12W). In 1865, it is reported to have consisted of 20 to 30 homes, two or three shops, two blacksmith shops and a shoemaker's shop, as well as saloons, a Faro bank and a hurdy gurdy house. The town served as the supply source for the miners and settlers in the area. A road from the Deer Lodge Valley to French Gulch connected the town to the rest of the territory. Another pioneer trail bisected the Mount Haggin Area and connected the gulch with the Big Hole Valley.

W. R. Allen, a future lieutenant governor of Montana, was born in the town of French Gulch in 1871. Allen's father had arrived in French Gulch six years earlier and had located one of the earliest placers at Allen's Bar. In his later published reminiscences, the younger Allen recalled what it was like to live in the isolated community of French Gulch.

Supplies had to be freighted in from either Salt Lake City over the Corrine Road or from Fort Benton over the Mullan Road. During the months November to May, snow, usually three to six feet deep, prohibited the delivery of large quantities of supplies. The only goods to reach the isolated community were those that were carried by men on snowshoes from the lower valleys. Mail that arrived from Warm Springs once a week during the winter was transported in this way. After spending the winters of 1871-1873 at French Gulch, the Allen family moved to a ranch in the Deer Lodge Valley. Thereafter, the elder Allen worked his placer claims in French Gulch only during the summer months.

Placer mining in the French Gulch Mining District, as in other mining districts, was a temporary phenomenon. The readily available nuggets from gravel bars and exposed crevices soon dissipated. By 1877, it was no longer profitable to recover gold with only a pan, rocker and sluice box. Many miners left the area at this time. Others, who had sufficient determination and capital, invested in the abandoned placer claims and began hydraulic mining in the gulch.

Hydraulic mining consisted of directing a concentrated stream of water at a potential gold-containing gravel area. The hundreds of cubic yards of material that would be dislodged in the process were channeled through sluice boxes to a screen, which would remove the sediment from the gold. This operation was essentially a more elaborate, and destructive, means of placer mining. It required the diversion of large amounts of water to the site of the hydraulic activity. The origin of many ditches along Oregon, California and American Creeks can be traced to this period of mining history of French Gulch.

The Allen family took advantage of the decline in placer mining at French Gulch by purchasing a number of the original diggings. Soon, the senior Allen had acquired most of the French Gulch camp. Other less ambitious prospectors also entered the district. Many of these new arrivals were Chinese. As in other mining districts throughout the west, Chinese succeeded Anglo miners at the old tailings. Leasing the placer claims from their owners, the Chinese methodically worked the mined-over gravel bars and beds. They often established small log dwellings near a claim or assumed residency in an abandoned cabin or even a mine tunnel. The Chinese probably left the French Gulch area during the mid-l890s. (Lyden 1948; Wolle 1963; *Mining World* 1904; WPA 1941; Dingman 1932).

In 1898, William R. Allen, who had been working for the Anaconda Company, left that firm's employ and assumed control of his father's mining properties at French Gulch. In conjunction with his acquisition of timber interests in the area, Allen soon consolidated more of the mining placer and lode claims in the district. They encompassed more than 800 acres of land. The Spain and McKinley mines were the cornerstones of what became

the Allen Gold Mining Company (Sections 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, T2N R11W; Section 1 T2N R12W; Sections 27, 29, 30, 31, T3N T11W.

The McKinley and Spain were subsurface mines. The McKinley mine had a shaft of 100 feet, while the larger Spain mine reached 200 feet below the surface. More than 30 men worked either above or below ground at the mines. In addition to the Spain and McKinley lodes, Allen worked a number of placer claims by hydraulic methods. The elevator had a capacity to carry between 500 and 1,000 yards of dirt and was used in areas where the stream gradient was too low to carry the sediments.

In 1900, Allen installed a dredge in the French Gulch District. The "Mildred" was a boat dredge that had buckets for digging stream gravel and conveying it to a screen that separated the gold from the tailings. It was one of the first large dredges to be established in Montana (Newell 1980).

Site 24DL757 is a National Register Eligible (Criterion A; possibly Criteria B and D) historic mining property (Wilmoth 2013) consisting of the placer and dredge tailings as well as a cabin, tent platforms, ditch remnants and other placer mining associated features along French Creek. Highway 43 bisects the site from north to south. Placer mining tails are found in both Moose Creek and French Creek as well as on the adjacent benches. Smaller linear rock piles and excavations observed within the site area and are attributed to the pre-dredge placering operations. The earliest placer mining operations occurred from 1863-1873. Bench placers were removed with hydraulic mining in the later 1870s-1880s. Hydraulic elevators were used in the upper reaches of French Creek to reach bedrock. A floating dredge was used in the early 1900s. Dredge tailings begin at the mouth of Moose creek and run approximately 900 m north to the mouth of French Gulch and surround the other historic features. Exploratory diggings are found on adjacent benches, and in surrounding drainages. Prospecting occurred at least intermittently in French Gulch into the 1930s and even later exploration was conducted. The subject features are considered to be outlying features of the French Gulch Placer Mining Site, 24DL757.

CONCLUSIONS

No definitive historical reference regarding these specific linear gravel features was found. Clearly the washed gravels are associated with placer mining and as such should be considered outlying features of site 24DL757, the French Creek Placers. It is not likely that the subject features are associated with dredging operation, rather they are probably associated with later mechanical excavators, perhaps steam shovel or later mechanized exploration. The linear gravel piles appear to represent exploratory mining for placer gold deposits below the main developed area of the French Creek Placers.

As these features lack specific temporal context and historical association and lie outside of the productive placer claims, these are recommended as non-contributing to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility of site 24DL757. They have been impacted by the construction of the original Secondary State Highway 569 (aka Secondary 274, aka Mill Creek Road). No further work is recommended.

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