

Release of Midas study pushed back to August Federal shutdown may result in further delay

BY TOM GROTE The Star-News

The federal study that is key to the Midas Gold mine near Yellow Pine moving forward will not be issued until August at the earliest, the Payette National Forest announced last week.

The study had been expected to be issued in May but the delay was due to a request by Midas Gold for more time to submit studies on water quality of the aquifers and streams at the mine site before, during and after the project, Payette Public Affairs Officer Brian Harris said.

“The mining operation will use a large amount of water,” Harris said. “(We want to know) what is the quality and quantity of that water when it is returned to the river system.”

The release of the draft study likely will be pushed back even further due to the 35-day federal shutdown, the Payette news release said. The extent of that additional delay will be known by April 1.

“While the extended timeframe is disappointing, we believe that this additional time safeguards the successful completion of the permitting process and ensures the best plan moves forward,” said Stephen Quin, president and CEO of Midas Gold Corp., a Canadian company with headquarters in Vancouver, B.C.

The delay in the release of the draft study means the soonest the Payette could issue the go-ahead for the project would be July 1, 2020, according to a Midas Gold release.

The water quality studies were among 115 requests for additional information from regulators to Midas Gold since the review of the project started in 2017, the Midas Gold release said.

Seven federal, state and local agencies are reviewing the plan of operation and restoration submitted by Midas Gold in December 2016.

Federal law does not allow the Payette to stop Midas Gold from mining, but the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 requires federal agencies to consider the effects of projects like the mine on people and the environment.

The draft study will include a range of alternatives that include requirements by the regulators on Midas Gold.

The public will get to comment on the various alternatives, and those comments will be taken into account in the drafting of a final study, after which a decision will be issued on which alternative to impose.

Midas Gold predicts it will employ 400 people during a two-to-three-year construction period, increasing to 500 employees over the 12-year life of the mine.

The company’s probable mineral reserves include more than 4.5 million ounces of gold, or 154 tons, and 100 million pounds of antimony, which is used as a flame retardant.