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MINERALS PROGRAM
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Open-Pit Mine Proposal Draws Cries From the Wilderness

By Jim Woolf
THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

proposed open-pit gypsum mine on a steep hill in the Mount Nebo Wilderness area near Nephi has been called an environmental "disaster," but the project appears inevitable unless the government decides to buy out the owner.

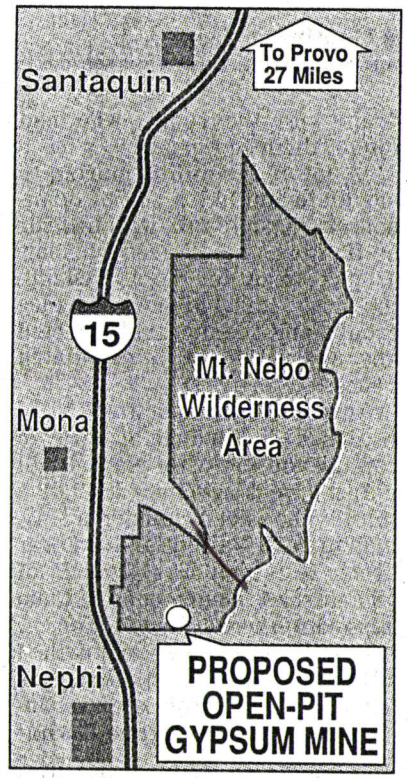
The mine has been proposed by Robert L. Steele, the mayor of Nephi. His claims are located about three miles northeast of Nephi, just inside the boundaries of the wilderness area. These claims were filed in 1926 — 58 years before the 29,000-acre wilderness area was designated.

The mine proposal presents a dilemma for environmentalists a: Forest Service managers. C. ruction of an open-pit mine would damage the natural values the wilderness area was supposed to protect, but the 1984 Utah Wilderness Act specifically allowed existing mining claims to be developed.

"Without question, this is a very controversial issue. And without question, Bob Steele has the right to mine that property," said Thomas Tidwell, Spanish Fork District ranger for the U.S. Forest Service.

Gary Macfarlane, natural resource specialist for the Utah Wilderness Association, said it would be a "disaster" to have an open-pit mine in this area. "The Forest Service has an obligation to look for a solution that protects the wilderness."

See A-2, Column 5



Chaos Looms in Af As Leader Falls Fr

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — All the factions in Afghanistan's war seemed sure they could control the events that would bring a peaceful end to President Najibullah's rule.

But the events raced out of control, dictating his swift surrender of power and leaving everyone wondering what happens next.

Many fear the absence of a strong government to replace Najibullah will mean chaos. The guerrillas, or mujahedeen, who have been battling the Soviet-installed Kabul government for 13 years are divided along political, religious and ethnic lines. Some are allied with Iran and others with Pakistan.

When Najibullah promised March 18 to turn over all authority to an interim government formed under a U.N. plan, most of the rebel groups and their backers thought his promise would jump the peace process into high gear.

But it may l Najibullah th duck ruler.

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By Anne Wilson
THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

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Open-Pit Mine Proposal Draws Cries From the Wilderness

■ Continued from A-1

Mr. Steele wants to improve an existing dirt road to gain access to the claims, and then use dynamite and bulldozers to dig up the gypsum. Front-end loaders would place the mineral in trucks that would haul it to a shipping plant near Nephi. Maximum production would be about 100 tons a day. Gypsum is used in the production of cement, soil conditioners, fertilizers, and wall board.

The mine would disturb about 63 acres and could undermine the stability of surrounding slopes, according to a draft environmental impact statement prepared by the U.S. Forest Service.

The environmental study considered an alternative that would limit the damage to the wilderness area by rerouting the road to the site, but the study did not seriously consider the option of the Forest Service buying Mr. Steele's claims.

"I have offered to sell that property to the Forest Service for fair market value," said Mr. Steele. He estimates the property is worth about $1 million. The U.S. Geological Survey's estimate is only $270,000.

"There's no question about it, $1 million is a lot of money. But if they intend to make a wilderness out of that — if that is what the people want — they should give me fair market value. If not, they should allow me to mine the property," said Mr. Steele.

Mr. Macfarlane said a government buyout would be a "win-win situation" that would protect the wilderness and compensate Mr. Steele.

The Forest Service's Mr. Tidwell said a buyout was not given serious consideration because the Utah Wilderness Act made special allowance for this type of mining. "This is a legitimate project, and we do not see any reason to try to purchase the property at this time."

The "great discrepancy" over the value of the gypsum deposit was another reason for discarding this approach, according to the environmental study.

If the claims are not purchased by the government, Mr. Macfarlane said the Forest Service at least should impose stringent "mitigation and reclamation requirements" to minimize damage.

This conflict was created during the final stages of negotiations over the Utah Wilderness Act when it was decided to enlarge the Mount Nebo Wilderness. This last-minute expansion included Mr. Steele's mining claims and adjacent lands that had not been studied previously for wilderness.

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