

Staff Report 61

PARTIES:

California State Lands Commission (Commission)

Bridgeport Indian Colony, a federally recognized tribe (BIC or Service Provider)

Hunewill Land and Livestock Co., Inc. (Surface Estate Owner)

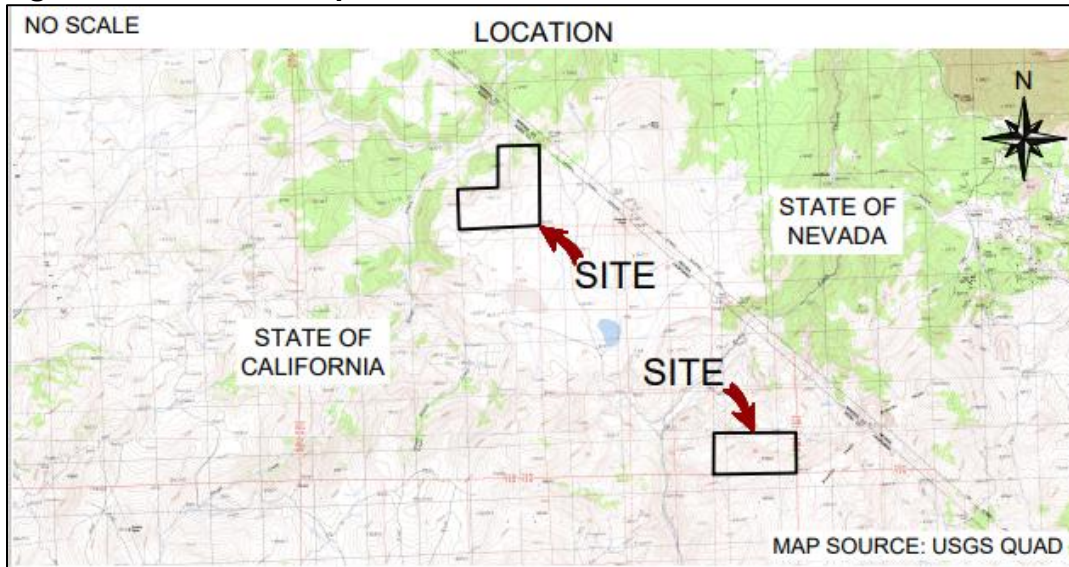
PROPOSED ACTION:

Consider a 4-year Following Agreement to hold fallow the reserved subsurface mineral interests described in Exhibit A.

AREA, LAND TYPE, AND LOCATIONS:

- Approximately 480 acres of State-owned, 100 percent reserved mineral interest school land (Assessor's Parcel Number 009-140-007), located within the Southwest 1/4 and the East 1/2 of Section 16, Township 5 North, Range 27 East, Mount Diablo Baseline and Meridian, about 15 miles northeast of the town of Bridgeport and approximately 5 miles north of Bodie State Historic Park, Mono County (as shown in Figure 1 below).
- Approximately 320 acres of State-owned, 100 percent reserved mineral interest school land (Assessor's Parcel Number 009-160-005), located within the South 1/2 of Section 36, Township 5 North, Range 27 East, Mount Diablo Baseline and Meridian, Mono County (as shown in Figure 1 below).

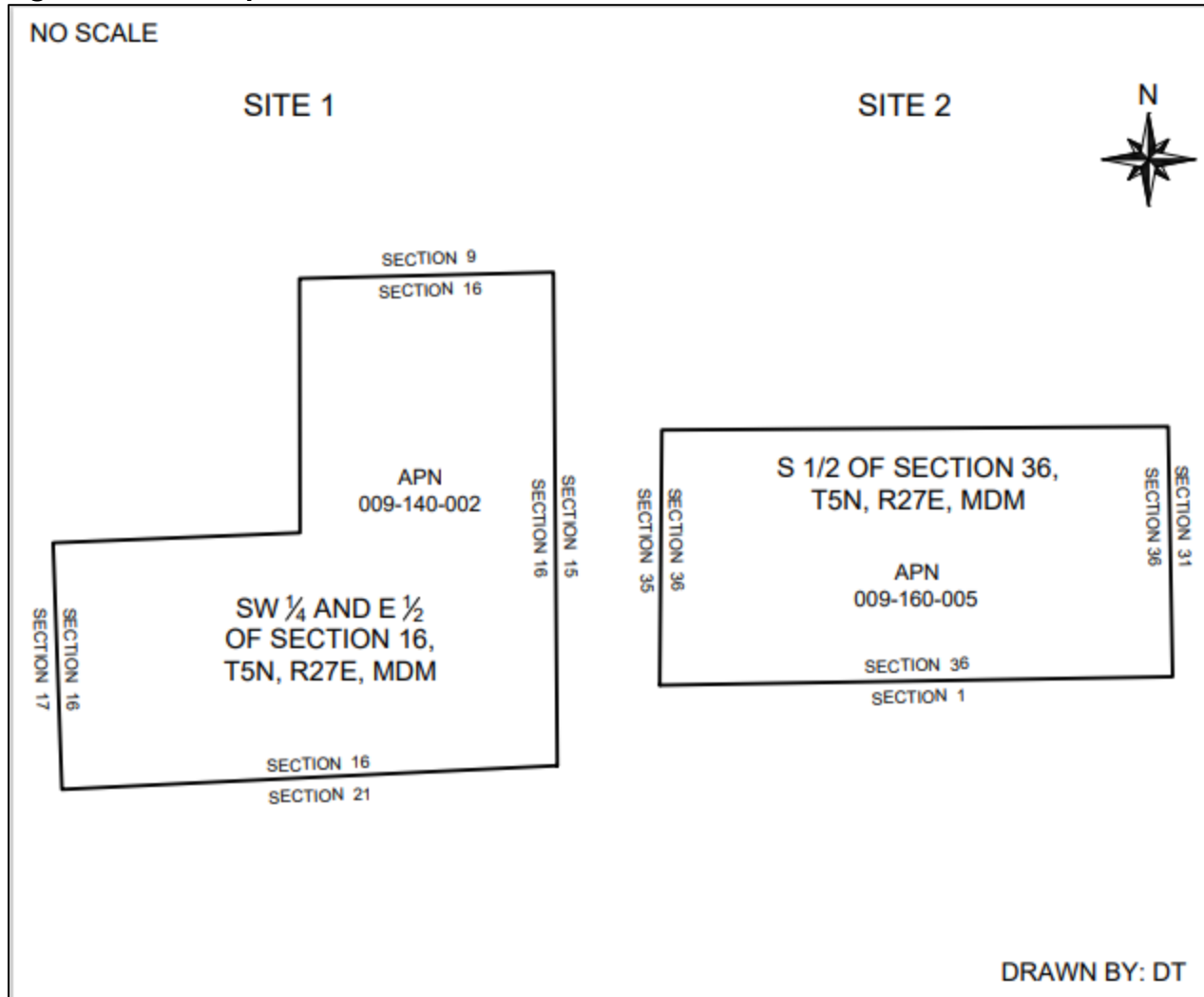
Figure 1. Location Map



AUTHORIZED USE:

Temporarily suspend mineral evaluation, exploration, and extraction or related development activities on the subsurface mineral estates shown in Figure 2 (below).

Figure 2. Site Map



NOTE: This depiction of the area is based on unverified information provided by the Commission and is not a waiver or limitation of any State interest in the subject or any other property.

TERM:

4 years, beginning June 23, 2026.

CONSIDERATION:

- BIC will host at least four public events annually that will be open to members of the public. Events may include but are not limited to presentations on tribal cultural connections to the land and its protection, Paiute language lessons, or traditional Tribal ceremonies. These events will be posted on the BIC and Bridgeport community Facebook pages. Other formats shall be used to the

extent feasible to publicize events, including posting event flyers at the Bridgeport General Store and other community businesses.

- Hunewill Land and Livestock Co., Inc. will grant BIC a right of surface entry.

SPECIFIC AGREEMENT PROVISIONS:

- The mineral estate shall be held fallow subject to the express understanding that during the term of the Agreement, no mineral evaluation, exploration, extraction, or related development activities that would imperil, modify, or impact the value or physical stability of the surface and subsurface estate shall occur.
- Service Provider and Surface Estate Owner, at their sole expense, will comply with all Applicable Laws.
- The Commission shall not grant any third party the right to access or use the surface estate for the purposes of mineral evaluation, exploration, extraction or development.
- Any Improvements on or within the subsurface reserved mineral interest are strictly prohibited under this Agreement. Unauthorized placement of any improvement will be removed at the sole cost of the Service Provider and/or Surface Estate Owner.

BACKGROUND:

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORIC CONTEXT

The Bodie Hills are a rugged volcanic highland in Mono County, located north of Mono Lake and near the Nevada border. The 480-acre and the 320-acre Reserved Mineral Interest (RMI) parcels under the Commission's jurisdiction are in Bodie Hills at the base of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range. Bodie Hills is an area of deep cultural significance to the Paiute people. The land is bounded by the Dry Lakes Plateau, a high elevation mesa, in the south, Table Mountain in the north, Rough Creek in the west, and Bodie Creek in the east, and includes the Bald and Beauty peaks.

The Dry Lakes Plateau has unique archaeological, paleobotanical, and tribal spiritual significance. Its rich and varied plant base supported reliable hunting and gathering throughout the Holocene era despite significant variability of the hydroclimate. Reliable water sources in the area have supported complex

archaeological sites, including ceremonial sites that provide evidence of continuous human reliance on the Plateau for hunting and gathering dating back 8,000 to 10,000 years. The Paiute people continue the traditional hunting, gathering, and ceremonial practices of their ancestors, which are inextricably linked to the historical and geographical features of the area. The area and these practices are important in maintaining their cultural identity.

In 2002, a National Register of Historic Places district designation (02001394) was approved for 3,340 acres of BLM land on the Dry Lakes Plateau, pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation and is part of a national program coordinating and supporting efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources.

The surface estate of the 480-acre Section 16 parcel was recently included in the Dry Lakes Plateau Archeological District (District) through an amendment to the District's 2002 National Register listing. The surface estate owner, who purchased the land in 2018, has shown clear support for its inclusion in the District. The amendment was approved by the California State Historic Resources Commission in November 2024 and by the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places at the National Park Service in May 2026. The amendment renames the District with a traditional Numu toponym, expands its boundaries to include the 480-acre surface estate, adds six contributing sites, and designates it as a Traditional Cultural Place. The expansion encompasses 630 acres of private land and 20 acres of BLM land.

The surface estate of the 320-acre Section 36 parcel, while not currently included in the District, is part of the broader Bodie Hills ethnographic landscape and holds the same cultural significance for the local indigenous community as the 480-acre Section 16 parcel. Starting in 2027, a cultural resources survey will be conducted by members of the BIC to document the cultural resources present on the Section 36 parcel.

TRIBAL CONSULTATION

Bodie Hills is home to several Paiute tribes, including BIC, which was formally recognized by the U.S. federal government on October 17, 1974, establishing a government-to-government relationship and setting up tribal sovereignty under its own constitution and bylaws. BIC is also a member of the [Four Tribes Alliance](#), a coalition of four Native American tribes working together to protect and manage the Tuvogatudu Plateau, a high volcanic plateau at the north end of Bodie Hills.

In December 2019, Commission staff began government-to-government consultation with BIC related to its objection to any future mining activities in the Bodie Hills area. In September 2021, the Commission received a letter from the BIC requesting additional consultation related to the Tribe's desire to have a permanent restriction on mining activities and the Commission's support to include the 480 Bodie Hills RMI parcel on the National Register of Historic Places via a map amendment process. In October 2021, the Commission received a letter from Hunewill Ranch requesting that the surface estate overlying the Commission's 480 Bodie Hills RMI parcel be protected from mining. These actions highlighted the parties' concerns about the impacts of mining on the environment and traditional cultural landscape, including sacred sites, in the Bodie Hills area.

MORATORIUM:

At the February 25, 2022, Commission meeting ([Item 48](#)), the Commission authorized a temporary 3-year moratorium on accepting and considering mineral prospecting permits and lease applications for the 480-acre, Section 16, Bodie Hills RMI parcel. The Commission also directed staff to conduct a needs assessment of the Commission's RMI parcel and adopted a Resolution supporting a proposed map amendment to add the 480-acre, Section 16 Bodie Hills RMI parcel to the District.

At the December 17, 2025, Commission meeting ([Item 61](#)), the Commission authorized a 1-year extension to the 2022 moratorium, which expired on February 24, 2026. Staff have continued to engage with representatives from BIC and the Four Tribes Alliance regarding their desire to restrict mining activities in the area. Staff also met with the surface estate owner in August and December 2025 to discuss a temporary prohibition on surface entry for mining or exploration activity. Work is continuing on the comprehensive needs assessment.

STAFF ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION

AUTHORITY:

Public Resources Code sections 6005, 6216, and 6501.1; California Code of Regulations, title 2, sections 2000 and 2003.

STATE'S BEST INTERESTS:

Under the School Land Bank Act (Pub. Res. Code. § 8700 et. seq.), the Commission must manage school lands as a revenue source to support the state's public school system and primarily consider fair market value in approving proposed land uses. This duty is a balancing act that requires numerous considerations when considering issuing leases or engaging in the appropriate long-term stewardship that accompanies both surface estate and mineral estate management, alongside the responsibility of acting in the best interests of the State (see both Pub. Res. Code. §6005 and §6897). Significant work to enhance the value and utility of school lands cannot be achieved with a one-size-fits -all approach and requires a nuanced understanding and evaluation of what options provide the most sustainable return. Under the proposed Agreement, the state is receiving valuable consideration in the form a tribal educational program benefitting the general public as well as an opportunity to preserve the unique cultural and environmental value of the subject parcels. These benefits are linked to the unique historical and geographical features of the area. Additionally, through the Agreement the state retains the mineral estate and any value existing therein.

Through the Commission's tribal consultation with BIC, staff has learned about BIC's rich ancestral history with the lands at Bodie Hills. The historical and cultural value of this area has been formally recognized by the California State Historic Resources Commission and the National Park Service. While preserving the lands' tribal cultural history would further BIC's interests, it would also further the State's interests because tribal history is an indispensable part of the State's history.

This Agreement presents an opportunity to work cooperatively with tribal governments and communities and is in line with State policies on Native American lands and land conservation. The statewide [Tribal Stewardship Policy](#) developed by the California Natural Resources Agency aims to build meaningful partnerships with California Native American tribes to enhance environmental stewardship and address historical injustices. This policy sets a long-term goal to expand tribal stewardship of at least 7.5 million acres of land and coastal waters by creating lasting tribal access, collaborative agreements, and returning ancestral lands to tribal ownership. Similarly, Governor Newsom's Executive Order [N-82-20](#) advances biodiversity conservation as a policy priority in the fight against climate change and commits California to the goal of conserving 30 percent of our lands and coastal waters by 2030 (30x30). A core 30x30 commitment is to strengthen tribal partnerships in recognition of California Native Americans' historical stewardship of and interdependence with state lands. In addition, the State of California has

enacted certain policies related to protecting cultural resources and tribal heritage, including Executive Order [N-15-19](#) and a [Statement of Administration Policy of Native American Ancestral Lands](#).

Recognizing the importance of teaching tribal history and lifeways, the BIC will host a minimum of four public events each year that will be open to the public as part of the Agreement. These events may include presentations on tribal cultural connections to the land and its protection, Paiute language lessons, or traditional Tribal ceremonies. Sharing tribal history and lifeways with the public helps people better understand the rich cultures, traditions, and contributions of tribal communities. It also promotes respect, reduces stereotypes, and provides a more complete picture of a region's history. Additionally, it helps highlight challenges tribal communities have faced and continue to face, encouraging empathy, and support for cultural preservation.

Staff continue to evaluate the 480-acre, Section 16 parcel that was subject to the moratorium. Staff has determined that while there is potential for gold on the property, exploratory drilling would be needed to determine if the mineral was present in commercial quantities. Staff believes that developing the mineral resources would be difficult and costly. Access to the surface estate above the minerals is rugged, rocky, and mountainous. There are no roads or other necessary infrastructure or resources, including water, to support commercial development. Additionally, helicopters would be required to transport heavy equipment. While the Commission has previously issued prospecting permits, no applicant has demonstrated commercial viability. The most recent prospecting permit for the 480-acre parcel was issued in 2017 and expired in 2019, and the Commission has received no permit applications since.

The BIC and surface estate owner believe any mining activities will harm tribal cultural resources on and below the surface estate because such activity would likely entail construction of an open-pit mine given the depth of potential ore deposits. Ground disturbance from open-pit mining can adversely impact cultural resources, such as archaeological sites, burial locations, and traditional plant-gathering areas.

The proposed Following Agreement was provided in consideration for a public educational program, led by the BIC, regarding the rich cultural history and continuing cultural impacts this landscape has as part of a shared tribal narrative through to the present. The Agreement is short term and does not alienate or otherwise impact the mineral estate, consistent with state and federal law.

CONCLUSION:

For the reasons stated above, staff believe that a 4-year agreement to hold fallow the subsurface estate is in the State's best interest.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:

1. The recommended authorizations are discretionary actions by the Commission. Each time the Commission approves or rejects an action on State-owned school land, it exercises legislatively delegated authority and responsibility as trustee of the State's school lands as authorized by law.
2. This action is consistent with the "Partnering with Sovereign Tribal Governments and Communities" and "Committing to Collaborative Leadership" Strategic Focus Areas of the Commission's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan.
3. Temporary suspension of mineral development activities is not a project as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act because it is an administrative action that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Authority: Public Resources Code section 21065 and California Code of Regulations, title 14, sections 15060, subdivision (c)(3), and 15378, subdivision (b)(5).

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

It is recommended that the Commission:

STATE'S BEST INTERESTS:

Find that a 4-year agreement to hold fallow the subsurface mineral estate is in the best interests of the State.

AUTHORIZATION:

Authorize a 4-year agreement with the Bridgeport Indian Colony and Hunewill Land and Livestock Co., Inc. to hold fallow the subsurface mineral estate, on approximately 480 acres of State-owned, 100 percent reserved mineral interest school land (Assessor's Parcel Number 009-140-007), located within the Southwest 1/4 and the East 1/2 of Section 16, Township 5 North, Range 27 East, Mount Diablo Baseline and Meridian, about 15 miles northeast of the town of Bridgeport and

approximately 5 miles north of Bodie State Historic Park, Mono County and approximately 320 acres of State-owned, 100 percent reserved mineral interest school land (Assessor's Parcel Number 009-160-005), located within the South 1/2 of Section 36, Township 5 North, Range 27 East, Mount Diablo Baseline and Meridian, Mono County, effective June 23, 2026.