Rare Earth Elements (REE) Deposits in New Mexico: Update

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Abstract

Deposits of rare earth elements (REE) are located in New Mexico, but they have not been important exploration targets in past years because demand has been met elsewhere. However, with a projected increase in demand, New Mexico deposits are being re-examined for their REE potential. REE-Th-U veins are found in the Gallinas, Capitan, and Cornudas Mountains and Laughlin Peak-Chico Hills; all are associated with Tertiary alkaline to alkalic-calcic igneous rocks. A small amount of bastnaesite, a REE mineral, was recovered during processing of fluorite mined in the Gallinas Mountains. Resources in the Gallinas Mountains amount to at least 537,000 short tons of 2.95% total REE. Four types of deposits are found in the Gallinas Mountains: epithermal REE-F veins, Cu-REE-F veins, REE-F breccia pipes and iron skarn deposits. The abundance of REE and other unusual minerals in the Cornudas Mountains suggests that the area has potential for undiscovered deposits of REE, niobium, and zirconium. U.S. Borax sampled and drilled in the Chess Draw area and found up to 0.06% total REE in samples. Other types of REE deposits in New Mexico include carbonatites in the Lemitar and Chupadera Mountains, Laughlin Peak-Chico Hills, Lobo Hill, and Monte Largo (Sandia Mountains). Disseminated Y-Zr deposits in Proterozoic syenite and nepheline syenite are known at Pajarito Mountain on the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation near Ruidoso, where one sample contained 6,869 ppm total REE. In 1990, Molycorp, Inc. reported historic resources of 2.7 million short tons grading 0.18% $Y2O_3$ and 1.2% ZrO_2 as disseminated eudialyte. The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs drilled five holes in 2014 and results are pending. Two additional deposit types have potential for REE in New Mexico: (1) Cretaceous heavy mineral, beach-placer sandstone deposits and (2) pegmatites. Drilling of one of these deposits, the Apache Mesa (formerly the Stinking Lake) beach-placer sandstone deposit in the Jicarilla Indian Reservation is expected to occur in the fall of 2015. Exploration has occurred in the Lemitar, Gallinas, and Cornudas Mountains for hydrothermal vein deposits. Many challenges, including permitting, face these industries in supplying REE elements. Most REE deposits are radioactive, although they contain less uranium and thorium then uranium mines, but will require special handling of the mine waste. Future development of these commodities will be challenging and more research is required to fully understand the REE potential in New Mexico.

Rare Earth Element	Symbol	Oxide	Conversion factor (% element x conversion factor = % oxide)	Atomic Number	Abundance in the upper crust (ppm)
Scandium	Sc	Sc_2O_3	1.5338	21	14
Yttrium	Y	Y_2O_3	1.269	39	21
Lanthanum	La	La_2O_3	1.173	57	31
Cerium	Ce	Ce_2O_3	1.171	58	63
Praseodymium	Pr	Pr_2O_3	1.17	59	7.1
Neodymium	Nd	Nd_2O_3	1.166	60	27
Promethium	Pm	*	*	61	*
Samarium	Sm	Sm_2O_3	1.16	62	4.7
Europium	Eu	Eu_2O_3	1.158	63	1.0
Gadolinium	Gd	Gd_2O_3	1.153	64	4.0
Terbium	Tb	Tb_2O_3	1.151	65	0.7
Dysprosium	Dy	Dy_2O_3	1.148	66	3.9
Holmium	Ho	Ho_2O_3	1.146	67	0.83
Erbium	Er	Er_2O_3	1.143	68	2.3
Thulium	Tm	Tm_2O_3	1.142	69	0.30
Ytterbium	Yb	Yb_2O_3	1.139	70	2.2
Lutetium	Lu	Lu_2O_3	1.137	71	0.31
Thorium	Th	ThO_2	1.138	90	10.5
Zirconium	Zr	ZrO_2	1.351	40	193
Niobium	Nb	Nb_2O_5	1.431	41	12

Table 1—Description of rare earth elements (REE) (from Taylor and McClennan, 1985; Samson and Wood, 2005; Rudnick and Gao, 2005; Castor and Hedrick, 2006; and Hedrick, 2009). * Promethium does not occur naturally.

Introduction

Overview

Before 2010 most Americans never heard of rare earth elements (REE), except maybe in high school chemistry class when studying the periodic table of elements (Table 1). However, in April 2010, China announced that it would impose immediate export quotas on REE in order to address environmental issues at their REE mines, regulate illegal REE mining operations, and to provide for a sustainable REE production and supply for China (i.e., monopoly, Gambogi and Cordier 2010). This announcement triggered an increase in price for REE and some panic buying. Then, in late September 2010, China halted exports of REE to Japan; the Japanese industry is a significant consumer of REE, particularly for production of electric/hybrid automobiles and

REE oxide	2009 US$/kg[1]	2014 US$/kg[1]	Selected Uses
La oxide	30	5	Fluid cracking catalysts, metallurgy, battery alloys
Ce oxide	30	4–5	Automotive catalysts, metallurgy, polishing powders, glass additives
Nd oxide	42	56–60	Magnets, metallurgy, automotive catalysts
Pr oxide	38	na	Magnets, metallurgy, automotive catalysts
Sm oxide	130	na	Magnets, metallurgy, catalysts
Dy oxide	170	320–360	Magnets, lasers
Eu oxide	1600	680–730	Phosphors, neutron absorber
Gd oxide	150	na	Magnets, phosphores, microwave devices, superconductors
Y oxide	44	15–17	Phosphors, glass additives, ceramics, lasers
Tb oxide	900	590–640	Phosphors, magnets, fuel cells
Er oxide	100	175	Fiber-optic telecommunication cables
Lu oxide	1800	na	Phosphors, catalysts, bubble memory devices
Sc oxide	na	134–221	Metallurgy, metal halide lamps

Table 2—Prices and selected uses of REE. There is significant variation in the price of REE oxides, which are dependent upon purity and product specifications. REE prices are based upon 99% purity in US$/kg. 1—from Cordier (2011) and USGS (2015). na—not available.

consumer electronics (Table 2). Although China reinstated REE exports to Japan in early November 2010 and has since dropped their export quotas, these incidents placed the phrase "rare earth elements" in recent headlines and resource planners, politicians, investors, and journalists throughout the world began to examine the future supply of REE. Today, China has lowered the prices of REE and there is very little active exploration outside of China. The deposits being mined and developed outside of China are struggling due to low REE prices and low investment funding. However, since REE are required for many green energy technologies, the industry will recover in the future and eventually new mines will be needed to meet this demand.

Rare earth elements (REE) include the 15 lanthanide elements (atomic number 57-71), yttrium (Y, atomic number 39), and scandium (Sc, atomic number 21; Table 1) and are commonly divided into two chemical groups, the light REE (La through Eu) and the heavy REE (Gd through Lu, Sc, and Y). REE are lithophile elements (elements enriched in the crust) that have similar physical and chemical properties, and, therefore, occur together in nature. However, REE are not always concentrated into deposits that are economical to mine and only a few deposits in the world account for current production (Committee on Critical Mineral Impacts of the U.S. Economy 2008; Hedrick 2009; Long et al. 2010). Thorium (Th), uranium (U), niobium (Nb) and other elements typically are found with REE. Most deposits are radioactive because of their Th and U content, although not as radioactive as uranium mines.

REE have many specialized applications in industry (Table 2), and for many applications there is no known substitute (Naumov 2008; Hedrick 2009). The U.S. once produced enough REE for U.S. consumption, but since 1999 more than 90% of the REE required by U.S. industry have been imported from China (Haxel et al. 2002). However, the projected increase in demand for REE in China, India, U.S., and other countries has resulted in increased exploration and ultimate production from deposits in the U.S. and elsewhere.

REE deposits have been reported from numerous areas in New Mexico (Fig. 1), but were not considered important exploration targets because demand in past years has been met by other deposits in the world. However, with the projected increase in demand, these areas in New Mexico are being re-examined for their REE potential. The purposes of this report are to (1) summarize the resource potential for REE in New Mexico, (2) update earlier compilations by McLemore et al. (1988a, b), Adams (1965), Long et al. (2010), and McLemore (2014a, 2015a), and (3) suggest areas in the state for future exploration.

For the purposes of this report, a REE occurrence is defined as (1) past production of REE minerals, (2) whole-rock chemical analysis of greater than 1,000 ppm total REE, 500 ppm Y, or 100 ppm Sc, or (3) REE minerals found in sufficient quantities to be considered a potential mineral resource. This is a summary of a larger, more extensive report in preparation. Data used in this report have been compiled from a literature review, field examination, and unpublished data by the author.

District Number	Name	Production	Reference
DIS092	Gallinas Mountains	146,000 lbs of bastnaesite concentrate from fluorite production from veins	Griswold (1959), Adams (1965), McLemore (2010a)
DIS148	Petaca district	112 lbs of samarskite, few hundred lbs of monazite, 12,000 lbs of Ta-Nb-REE ore from pegmatites	Bingler (1968), Jahns (1946)
DIS162	Elk Mountain-Spring Mountain	500 lbs of Ta-U-REE concentrate from pegmatites	Jahns (1946), Holmquist (1946)
DIS164	Rociada	Several thousand tons of REE-Ta ore from pegmatites	Sheffer and Goldsmith (1969), Jahns (1953)
DIS166	Tecolote	$10,000 worth of beryl, tantalite-columbite and monazite from pegmatites	Redmon (1961)
DIS058	Gold Hill	Production in 1950s from pegmatites	Gillerman (1964)

Table 3—REE production from New Mexico deposits.

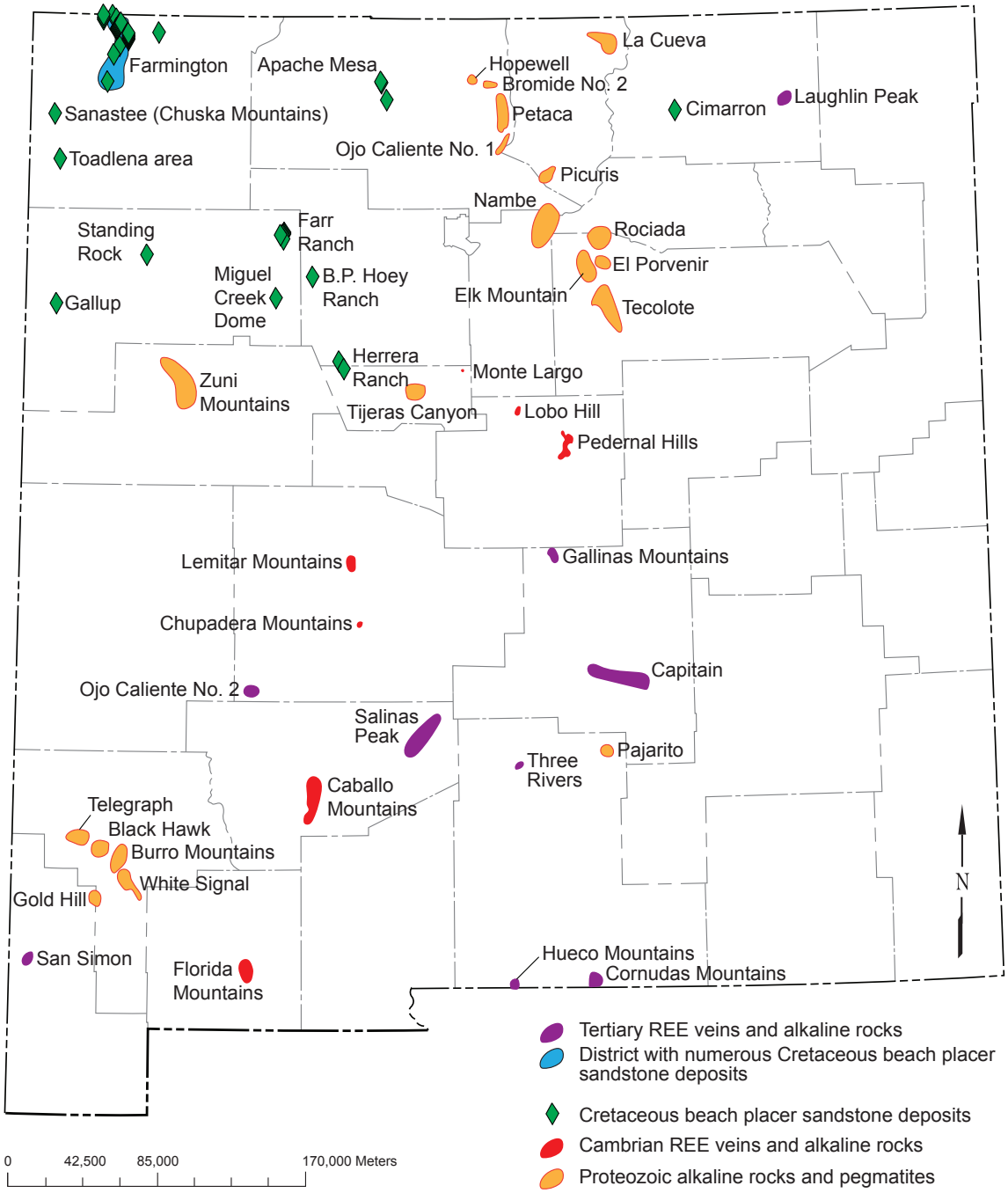

Figure 1—Mining districts in New Mexico that contain rare earth elements (REE) deposits (modified from McLemore et al., 2005a, b; McLemore, 2011, 2014a). Summary of districts is in McLemore (2014a).

Mining and Exploration of REE in New Mexico

REE are found throughout New Mexico and exploration has recently occurred in the Lemitar, Gallinas, and Cornudas Mountains (Fig. 1). The Bureau of Indian Affairs drilled five holes in the Pajarito Mountain Y-Zr deposit on the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation near Ruidoso in 2014. The NMBGMR has recently investigated REE deposits in veins and breccia pipes in the Gallinas Mountains, episyenites in the Caballo, Burro, and Zuni Mountains, and Cretaceous beach placer sandstone deposits in the San Juan Basin. New Mexico mines produced small amounts of REE as early as the 1940s from some pegmatite deposits in San Miguel, Santa Fe, Rio Arriba, and Taos Counties in northern New Mexico in Grant County in southwestern New Mexico and from the Gallinas Mountains in Lincoln County vein deposits (Table 3).

Types of REE deposits in New Mexico

Alkaline igneous rocks

Many alkaline igneous rocks, typically of syenite or granite composition, have higher concentrations of REE then other types of igneous rocks. Alkaline rocks are defined as rocks with $Na_2O+K_2O>0.3718(SiO_2)-14.5$ (MacDonald and Katsura 1964) or rocks with mol Na_2O+mol K_2O>mol Al_2O_3 (Shand 1951). Peralkaline rocks are particularly enriched in heavy REE, Y, and Zr. Some alkaline igneous rocks in the world contain potential economic REE deposits, and REE, Zr, Be, Nb, Ta, and other elements reside in accessory minerals that are disseminated in the alkaline igneous rock, which can be difficult to separate and process.

Disseminated Y-Zr deposits in syenite are found at Pajarito Mountain (Fig. 1). Several varieties of syenite, nepheline syenite,

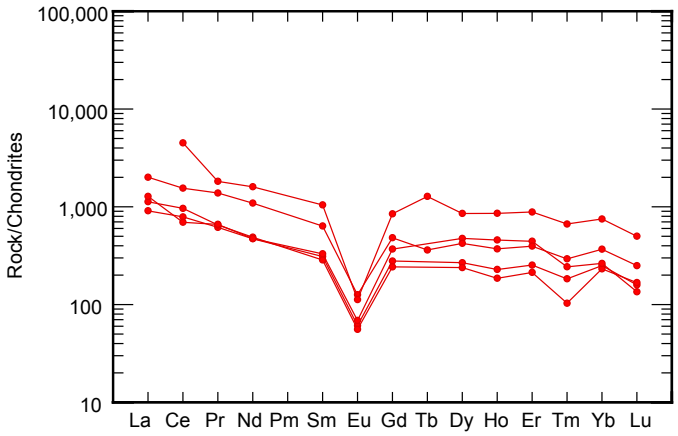

Figure 2— REE chondrite-normalized plot of syenite samples from the Pajarito Mountain deposit, Otero County. Note the enriched light REE pattern. Unpublished chemical analyses are by the author. These plots are used by convention to compare REE analyses. The y-axis shows the ratio of concentration of the element in the sample divided by the concentration of the element in chondrite, using the chondrite values from Nakamura (1974). The x-axis is the element of interest. *Nakamura 1974–REEs.*

quartz syenite, alkali granite, and gabbro are exposed at Pajarito Mountain and are intruded by pegmatite and gabbroic dikes (Kelley 1968; Moore et al. 1988; Sherer 1990; McLemore 1990, 1991). The origin of the Parajito Mountain complex is speculative at present, due to the lack of detailed petrographic and geochemical studies. The mineralogy of the alkaline rocks is complex, consisting of various amounts of essential K-feldspar, plagioclase, arfvedsonite and accessory riebeckite, quartz, eudialtye, fluorite, monazite, apatite, biotite, rutile(?), titanite, aegirine-augite, ziconium silicates, lanthanide and yttrium minerals and zircon. Selected unpublished chemical analyses by the author indicate these alkaline Proterozoic rocks are anonymously high in light-REE (La as high as 1,500 ppm, Ce as high as 3,910 ppm, 6,869 ppm total REE; Fig. 2) and niobium (200 ppm). In 1990, Molycorp, Inc. reported historic resources of 2.7 million short tons grading 0.18% Y_2O_3 and 1.2% ZrO_2 as disseminated eudialyte. Additional feasible studies are required to confirm this historic resource.

Figure 3— View looking southwest across Caballo Lake showing REE-bearing fine-grained episyenite (foreground) in the Northern Caballo granite in the Caballo Mountains.

Other areas in New Mexico have potential for REE associated with alkaline rocks, especially Cambrian-Ordovician episyenites in the Caballo, Burro, and Zuni Mountains (Riggins 2014; Riggins et al. 2014). The term *episyenite* is used to describe altered rocks that were desilicated and metasomatized by alkali-rich fluids (Leroy1978; Recio et al.1997). These metasomatic rocks in the Caballo, Burro, and Zuni Mountains were erroneously called syenites and alkali granites, but are actually metasomatic in origin and not primary igneous rocks. Episyenites are similar to rocks formed by fenitization and are called fenites by some geologists. Fenitization is the alkali-metasomatism associated with carbonatites or alkaline igneous activity (LeBas 2008). However, we are reluctant to use the term fenite for these rocks in the Caballo, Burro, and Zuni Mountains because a carbonatite or alkaline magma source has not been observed at the surface in these areas. Episyenites also are found at Lobo Hill where episyenites, carbonatites, and lamprophyres have been mapped and sampled (McLemore et al. 1999).

The Cambrian-Ordovician alkaline magmatic event is well-documented in southern Colorado and New Mexico and is characterized by carbonatites, episyenites, lamprophyres, and other alkaline rocks dated between 664 and 450 Ma (McLemore et al. 1999; McMillan and McLemore 2004). REE disseminations in episyenites in the Caballo, Burro, Zuni Mountains, Lobo and Pedernal Hills are associated with this Cambrian-Ordovician magmatic event. The episyenites, which are nonfoliated, non-metamorphosed igneous rocks, cross cut Proterozoic foliations and are enriched in REE, U, Th, Nb, and other elements.

McLemore (1986), McLemore et al. (1988a, b, 2012), Riggins (2014), and Riggins et al. (2014) briefly described the known REE-Th-U and Nb episyenite deposits in the Red Hills, Palomas Gap, Longbottom Canyon, and Apache Gap areas of the Caballo Mountains. The episyenites are spotty, discontinuous tabular

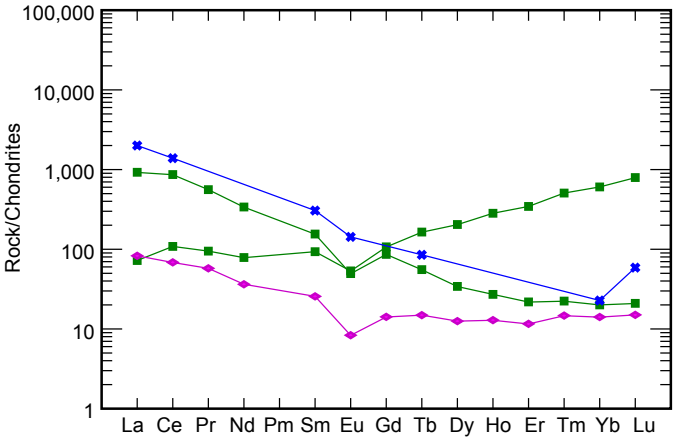

Figure 4— Chondrite-normalized REE patterns (Nakamura, 1974) of selected episyenite samples (green) show enrichments in total REE compared to the host granite (pink) and Lemitar carbonatites (blue). Some episyenites are enriched in HREE, whereas others are enriched in LREE. Most episyenites fall between the LREE and HREE enriched end members. The overall pattern of LREE enrichment is very similar to New Mexico Cambrian–Ordovician carbonatites (blue), (Riggins, 2014). *Nakamura 1974–REEs.*

bodies, narrow lenses, and breccia zones along faults, fractures, and shear zones in Proterozoic rocks (Fig. 3). Selected samples of episyenites from the Red Hills area in the Caballo Mountains contain as much as 20,000 ppm Th, 1,600 ppm U, 500 ppm Nb, 5,000 ppm Y, 600 ppm Be, 7,500 ppm Ga, and 200 ppm La. Some episyenites are enriched in heavy REE (Fig. 4).

Carbonatites

Carbonatites are carbonate-rich rocks of apparent magmatic derivation containing more than 50% magmatic carbonate minerals and less than 20% SiO_2 (Woolley and Kempe 1989; LeMaitre 1989, 2002; Verplanck et al. 2014), and typically are found in zoned complexes consisting of alkaline igneous

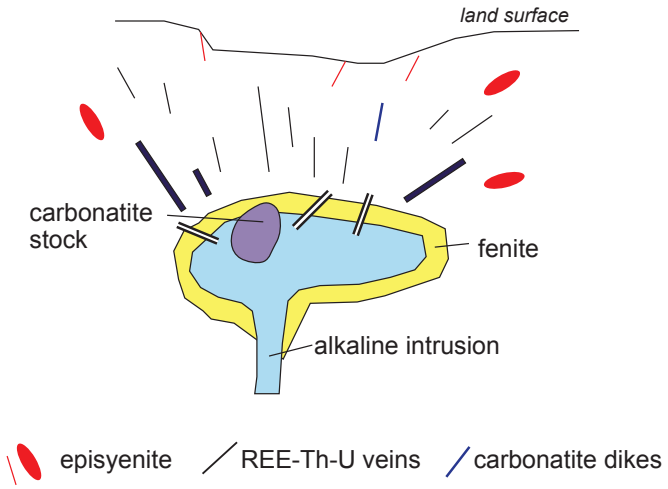

Figure 5—Relationship of Th-REE veins to alkaline rocks and carbonatites. *Modified from Staatz, 2000.*

and/or carbonatite stocks, ring dikes, and cone sheets (Fig. 5). Carbonatites generally contain REE, U, Th, Nb, Ta, Zr, Hf, Fe, Ti, V, Cu, Sr, and are composed of calcite, dolomite, apatite, magnetite, vermiculite, and barite (Singer 2000). Typically, carbonatites are found in continental shields and continental rift environments. Fenitization is the predominant alteration associated with carbonatites; fenites are the altered rocks produced by fenitization. The Mountain Pass carbonatite is the largest economic carbonatite in North America, where bastnaesite was produced from 1954 to 2002 and in 2012 to present. Current

Figure 6—Carbonatite dike (brown) intruding the Proterozoic diorite in the Lemitar Mountains.

reserves at Mountain Pass are estimated at more than 20 million metric tons of ore grading 8.9% total REE oxide (Castor 2008).

Carbonatites localities in New Mexico include the Lemitar and Chupadera Mountains, Laughlin Peak-Chico Hills, Lobo Hill, and Monte Largo (Sandia Mountains) in New Mexico (Fig. 1). Although carbonatites have not been found in the Gallinas Mountains, they are suspected to occur in the subsurface based on mineralogy and alteration (McLemore 2010a). Compositionally, the carbonatites in New Mexico are sövites, rauhaugites, and silicocarbonatites. The dikes are typically 1–5 ft wide (Fig. 6) and up to 1,500 ft long, and contain anonymously high concentrations of REE (Fig. 7), U, Th, and Nb.

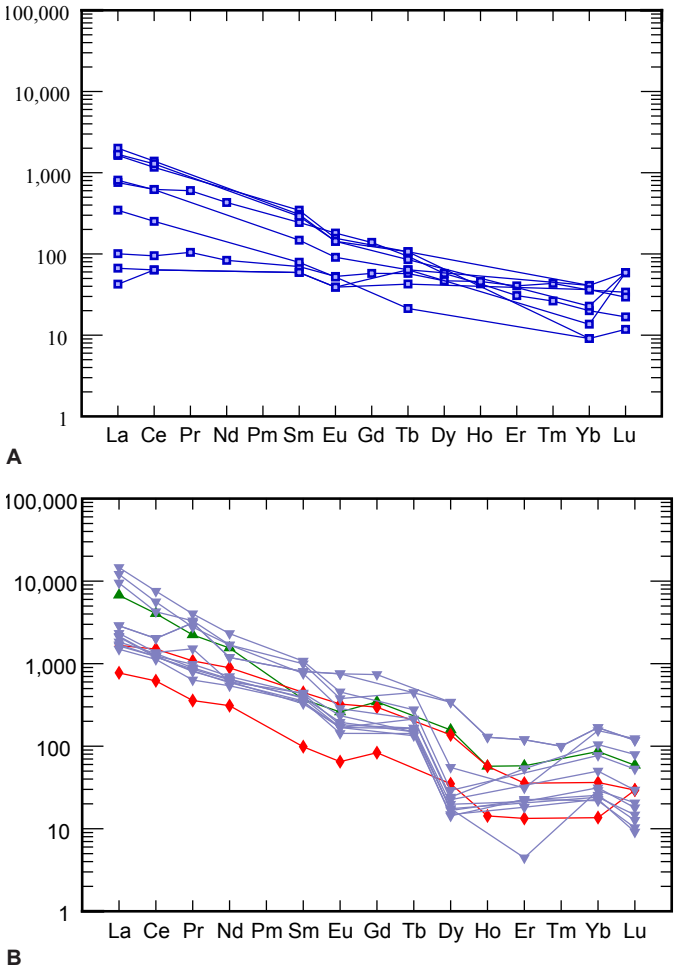

Figure 7—Chondrite-normalized REE patterns for carbonatites in New Mexico. A) Lemitar carbonatites. B) Carbonatites from Chupadera Mountains (red), Lobo Hill (green), and Laughlin Peak districts. *Nakamura 1974–REEs.*

REE-Th-U hydrothermal veins

REE-Th-U hydrothermal vein and breccia deposits (Staatz 2000) consist of various Th and REE minerals and are commonly associated with alkaline igneous rocks and carbonatites. REE-Th-U veins are associated with Tertiary alkaline igneous rocks in New Mexico in the Gallinas, Capitan, and Cornudas Mountains and Laughlin Peak-Chico Hills (Fig. 1). REE-Th-U vein and breccia deposits in New Mexico are typically found as tabular bodies, narrow lenses, and breccia zones along faults, fractures and shear zones. They are a few feet to 1,000s of feet long, as much as 10 ft wide, and can be discontinuous along strike, with varying grades and mineralogy. Globally, REE-Th-U veins are typically associated with carbonatites and alkaline rocks (Fig. 5).

Past production of bastnaesite has come from the Gallinas Mountains (Table 3). Four types of deposits characterize the Gallinas Mountains: epithermal REE-F veins, Cu-REE-F veins, REE-F breccia pipes and iron skarn deposits (McLemore, 2010a). District zonation is defined by Cu-REE-F (±Pb, Zn, Ag) hydrothermal veins that form the center of the district, surrounded by REE-F hydrothermal veins (McLemore 2010a). The magmatic-hydrothermal breccia pipe deposits form a belt partially surrounding the veins and contain the highest gold values, as much as 1,707 ppb (0.05 oz/short ton) Au as reported by Schreiner (1993) and McLemore (2010a). Iron skarns formed at the top and edge of the trachyte/syenite body and are likely the earliest stage of mineralization. The iron skarns are probably related to the REE-F and REE-F-Cu veins and breccias because they typically contain bastnaesite and fluorite and are similar in

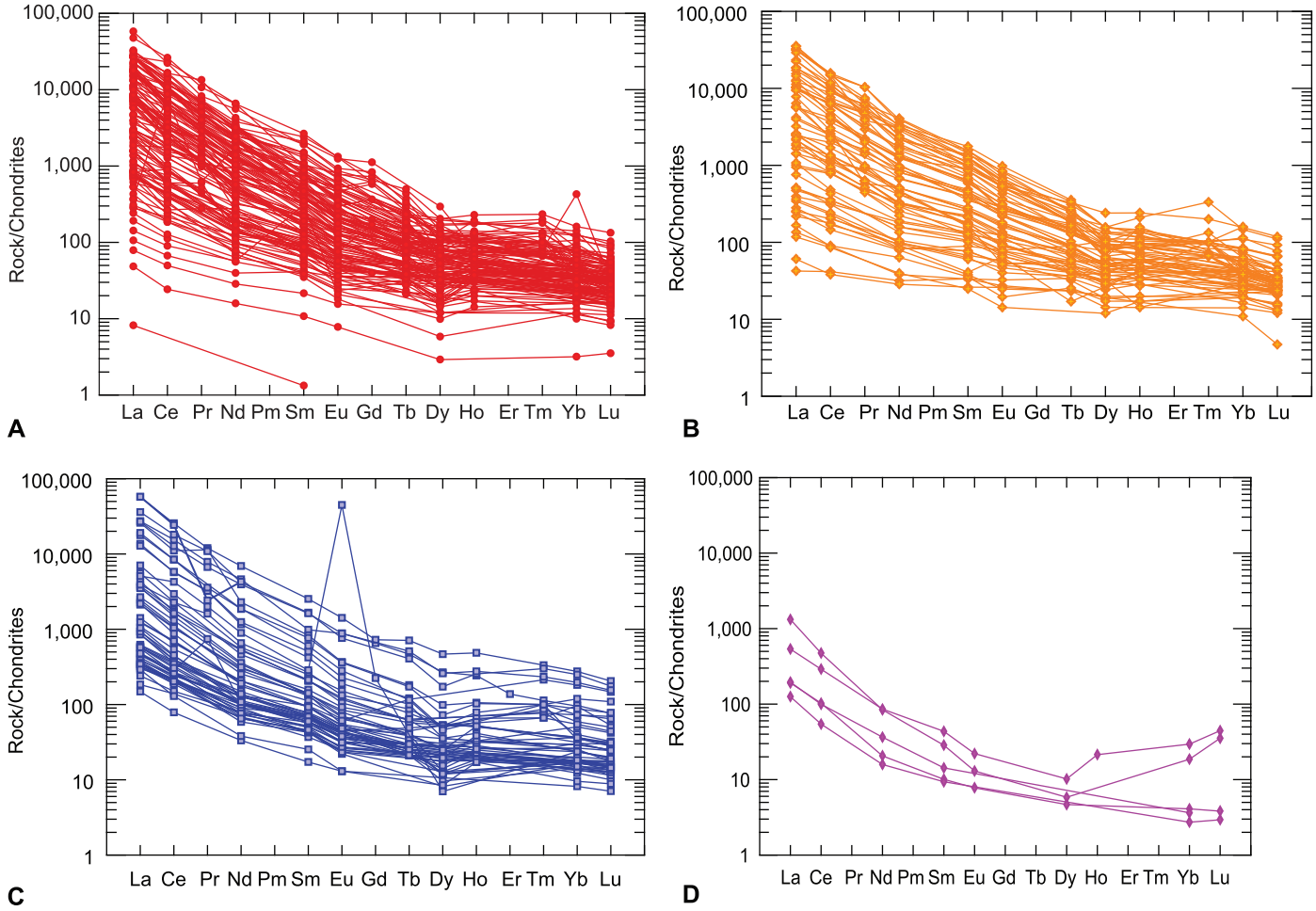

Figure 8—Chondrite-normalized REE plots (Nakamura, 1974) of mineralized samples from the Gallinas Mountains. Data from Schreiner (1993) and McLemore (2010a). Note the similarity in REE patterns between the different deposit types. A) REE-F veins (131 samples); B) Cu-REE-F veins (65 samples); C) Breccia pipe deposits (58 samples); D) iron skarns (6 samples). *Nakamura 1974–REEs.*

REE and other trace element geochemistry (Fig. 8; McLemore 2010a). Fenites exhibit light REE enriched chondrite-normalized REE patterns (Schreiner, 1993). The mineralogy in the Gallinas Mountains is diverse and includes fluorite, quartz, barite, pyrite, iron oxides and accessory bastnaesite, calcite, chalcedony, galena, bornite, chalcocite, pyromorphite, anglesite, chrysocolla, malachite, and azurite and rare agardite (yttrium-arsenic oxide), mimetite, wulfenite, vanadinite, mottramite, cerusite, among others (Perhac 1970; DeMark 1980; DeMark and Hlava 1993; McLemore 2010a; Vance 2013). Resources in the Gallinas Mountains amount to at least 537,000 short tons of 2.95% total REE (not NI-43-101 compliant; Schreiner 1993). A genetic model is summarized by intrusion/extrusion of crustal-derived igneous source rock in an extensional terrain possibly related to an alkaline-carbonatite complex with mineralization related to mixing of magmatic-hydrothermal and formation fluids (Vance, 2013).

Although there has been no mineral production from the Laughlin Peak district, three types of mineral deposits have been identified: (1) carbonatites, (2) breccia pipes, and (3) Th-REE hydrothermal veins (McLemore 2015a, b). Radioactive carbonatite dikes have the chemical composition of predominantly ferruginous calciocarbonatite, with some calciocarbonatite (also known as calcite carbonatite or sövite) and magnesiocarbonatite (also known as dolomite carbonatite or beforsite) and contain <1.6% total REE (Fig. 7, 9). The radioactive Th-REE veins cut Cretaceous sedimentary rocks and Tertiary volcanic flows, dikes and sills, strike predominantly west to northwest with steep north or south dips, and are less than 900 ft long and less than 3 ft wide. Crandallite, xenotime, thorite, and brookite are the predominant REE minerals and contain <1.2% total REE (Fig. 9) and <165 ppb Au. The radioactive intrusive breccia pipes consist of various iron and manganese oxide-stained, angular to subrounded rock fragments in a fine-grained siliceous and carbonate matrix of quartz and feldspar. The total REE is less than 3,017 ppm. The breccia pipes also contain as much as 5,900 ppm F, 9,050 ppm Ba, 535 ppm Nb, 54 ppm U and 82 ppb Au.

The Capitan pluton is associated with Th-REE (±Au, U) vein (Fig. 10), iron skarn and vein, and manganese vein and replacement deposits (McLemore 2014b). Iron and a small shipment of uranium ore were produced from the district. The Th-REE (±Au, U) veins occur along the western end of the pluton. One sample from the McCory prospect contains 8,133 ppm total REE (V.T. McLemore, unpublished data). Iron skarn and vein deposits are found along the western and northeastern portions of the pluton, whereas manganese deposits are along the northeastern portion of the pluton. The Th-REE (±Au, U) veins contain quartz, fluorite, adularia, hematite, calcite, fluorite, titanite, allanite, thorite, chlorite, and clay minerals (McLemore and Phillips 1991). They probably formed from late magmatic fluids evolved from the Capitan pluton as indicated by highly saline (as much as 80% eq. NaCl) fluid inclusions with homogenization temperatures of 500–600°C (Campbell et al. 1995).

The abundant REE and other unusual minerals in the Cornudas Mountains suggests that the area has potential for undiscovered deposits of REE, niobium, and zirconium (Schreiner 1994). U.S. Borax sampled and drilled in the Chess Draw area and reported up to 0.06% total rare-earth oxides,

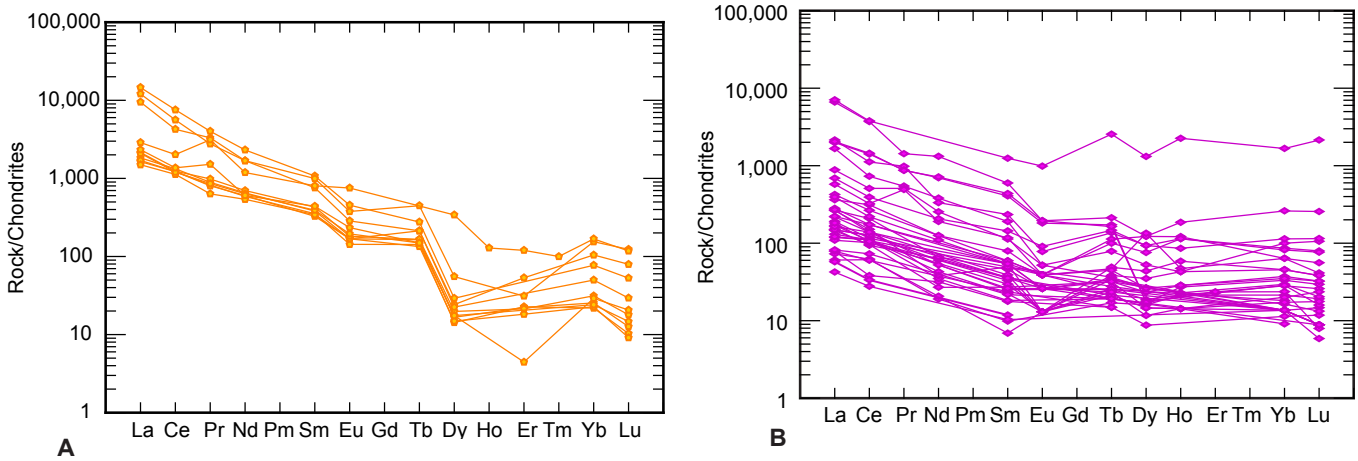

Figure 9—Chondrite-normalized (*Nakamura, 1974*) REE plots of carbonatites. A) and veins; B) from the Laughlin Peak district. Data are from Schreiner (1991) and McLemore (2015b). Nakamura, 1974–REEs.

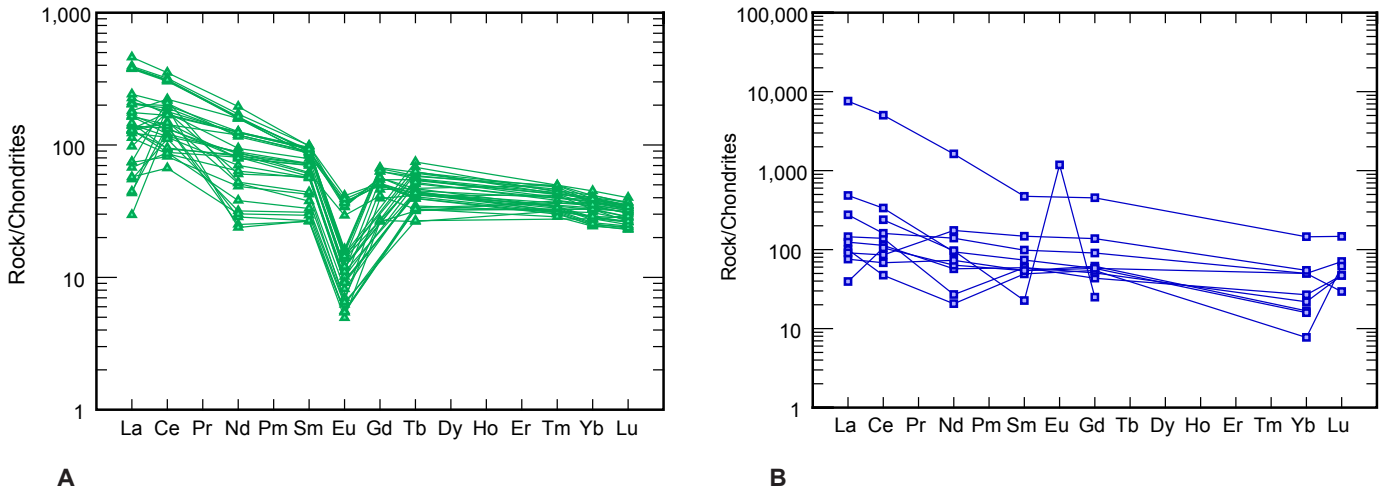

Figure 10—REE plots of granitic rocks (green) A) above left; and REE-Th-U veins (blue) B) above right; in the Capitan Mountains, Lincoln County. Eu was not analyzed in some vein samples. Chondrite values from Nakamura (1974). Data from Alan and McLemore (1991) and V.T. McLemore (unpublished data). *Nakamura, 1974–REEs.*

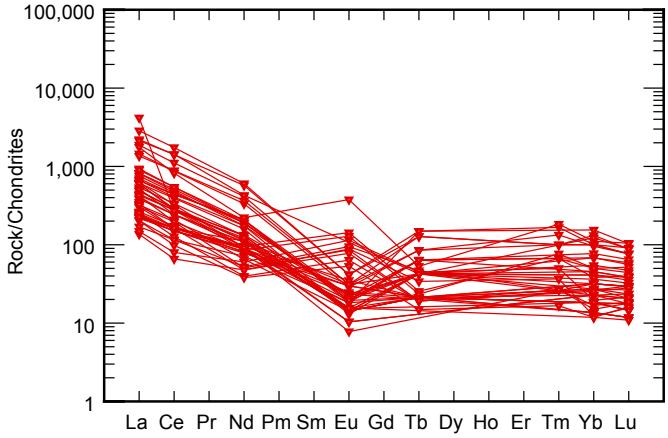

Figure 11—Chondrite-normalized REE plots of mineralized veins and breccias from the Cornudas Mountains. Data are from Schreiner (1994) and unpublished data by the author. *Nakamura, 1974–REEs.*

10–1,400 ppm Nb, 10–3,000 ppm Zr, 230–13,000 ppm F. An analysis of a dike reported by McLemore et al. (1988a, b) contained 1,235 ppm Ce, 700 ppm La, 270 ppm Nd, and 242 ppm Y (Fig. 11). Analyses reported by Schreiner (1994) include as much as 3,790 ppm total REE (Fig. 11), 2,332 ppm Nb, 92 ppm Be, and 3,137 ppm F. Geovic Mining Corp. drilled in the Cornudas Mountains area in 2012, but results are unknown. Additional geologic, geochemical, and other exploration techniques are required to properly evaluate this area, especially in dikes and along intrusive contacts with the limestones.

Pegmatites

Pegmatites are coarse-grained igneous rocks, lenses, or veins with granitic composition, contain essential quartz and feldspar, and represent the last and most hydrous phase of crystallizing magmas (Page and Page 2000; Ercit 2005). Complex pegmatites include mineralogical and/or textural zoning. Pegmatites can contain a variety of economic minerals, including, mica, quartz, feldspar, and are enriched in Li, REE, Cs, Ta, Nb, Rb, Y, Sc, U, Th, Sn, B, Be and others. A number of pegmatites in New Mexico have yielded REE production in the past (Table 3), but in general pegmatites in New Mexico are poor mining targets, because the REE minerals are widely dispersed within throughout the pegmatite and are difficult to selectively mine and process.

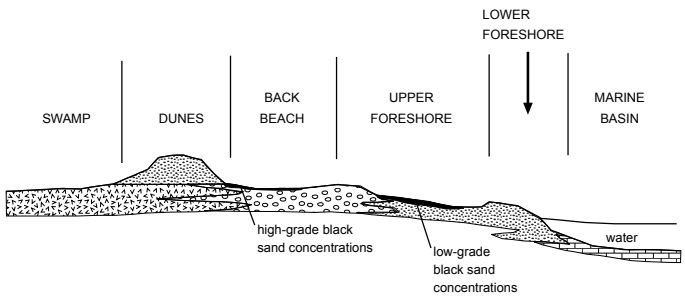

Figure 12—Idealized cross-section of formation of beach placer sandstone deposits (Houston and Murphy, 1970).

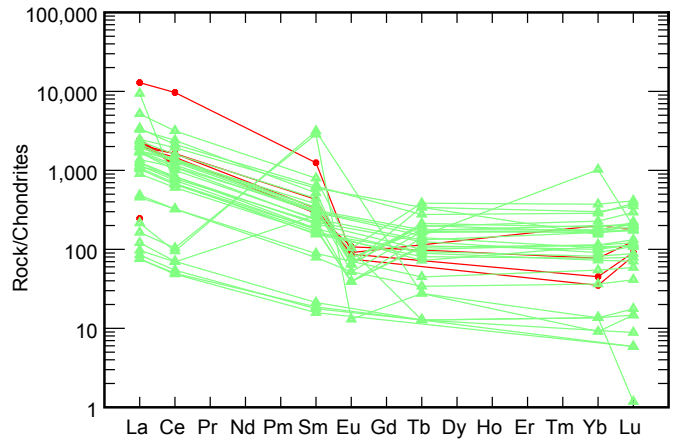

Figure 13—Chondrite-normalized REE plot of selected beach-placer deposits, San Juan Basin, New Mexico. Green are from the Ute Reservation (Zech et al., 1994) and red are from other beach placer deposits (McLemore, 2010b). *Nakamura, 1974–REEs.*

Placer deposits

Placer deposits form by mechanical concentration of heavy minerals in a sedimentary environment, such as a river or beach. Ilmenite, rutile, magnetite, zircon, monazite and xenotime are the predominant economic minerals. Modern examples are Eneabba, western Austalia and Odisha, India. Heavy mineral, beach-placer sandstone deposits is a specific type of placer deposit in New Mexico that contains REE. Heavy mineral, beach-placer sandstone deposits are concentrations of heavy minerals that formed on beaches or in longshore bars in a marginal-marine environment (Fig. 12; Houston and Murphy, 1970, 1977; McLemore, 2010b). Many beach-placer sandstone deposits contain high concentrations of Th, REEs (Fig. 13), Zr, Ti, U, Nb, Ta, and Fe. Detrital heavy minerals comprise approximately 50–60% of the sandstones and typically consist of titanite, zircon, magnetite, ilmenite, monazite, apatite, and allanite, among others. In New Mexico, these deposits are in Cretaceous sedimentary rocks (McLemore, 2010b). The Sanostee deposit is the largest known beach placer sandstone deposit in New Mexico (Fig. 14), but additional sampling and drilling are required to fully delineate the deposit and evaluate the REE resource potential (McLemore 2010b). Drilling of one of these deposits, the Apache Mesa (formerly known as Stinking Lake) deposit in the Jicarilla Indian Reservation, is expected to occur in the fall of 2015.

Another type of placer deposit in New Mexico are placer alluvial deposits formed down slope of REE-enriched Proterozoic pegmatites and granites. Residual placer deposits are reported from Ojo Caliente district in Rio Arriba County, where REE minerals are found in the alluvial sediments derived from pegmatites (Fig. 1).

Figure 14— Beach placer sandstone deposits forming top of cliffs at the Sanostee deposit.

Other potential REE-bearing deposits

Minor amounts of REE can be found in U, Th, and phosphate deposits and, if mined, REE could be recovered as a by-product (Jackson and Christiansen, 1993). Other placer deposits (fluvial, alluvial placers) could carry anomalous amounts of REE. Fluorite veins can carry high concentrations of REE, especially Y. Some Proterozoic granites in New Mexico could have pegmatitic zones that are enriched in REE. Tertiary alkaline igneous rocks associated with gold veins east of the Rio Grande rift are being examined for potential REE deposits (McLemore 2015a). REE also can be associated with uraninite and other U-bearing minerals (Förster 1999; Göb et al. 2013) suggesting that sandstone uranium deposits should be examined for their REE potential, especially as a potential by-product of future uranium production. REE were produced from uraninite at the Elliott Lake paleoplacer U-REE in Ontario, Canada **http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/Nuclear-Fuel-Cycle/Uranium-Resources/Uranium-From-Rare-Earths-Deposits/**, accessed 7/28/15.

Potential for New Mexico REE deposits

Increasing demand for cell phones, televisions, computers, iPods, video games, wind turbines, magnets, hybrid/electric cars, and solar panels results in increased demand for more REE. Mines that can be quickly permitted and which meet current regulations will likely be the next REE producers, even if better deposits are discovered later. However, REE mines, like all mine operations, will be productive for a limited time and new resources will have to be developed to meet the demand for REE in the future. New Mexico has some deposits that are in the early exploration stage and it will take years for these deposits to be developed, if they are economic. However, it is important to understand the REE potential in New Mexico, even if deposits are not produced in the next few years, because these resources could be important in the future and it takes many years to obtain mine permits and begin production.

There are no known substitutes for REE for most applications. New research is ongoing to develop technologies that will require less REE (Gambogi and Cordier 2010). Manufacturers are finding ways to be more careful about how they use REE. Just as aluminum cans became thinner as the price of that metal soared, companies will learn to make better use of the available REE.

The best potential sources for exploration for REE in New Mexico are 1) the disseminated Y-Zr deposits in syenite are found at Pajarito Mountain, 2) carbonatites, and 3) REE-Th-U hydrothermal vein and breccia deposits, particularly in the Gallinas Mountains, Laughlin Peak, and Cornudas Mountains districts. Strategic Resources Ltd. drilled in the Lemitar Mountains in 2011 and Galinas Mountains in 2011–2012. Geovic Mining Corp. drilled in the Cornudas Mountains area in 2012. BE Resources Inc. announced that the Apache Warm Springs beryllium deposit in rhyolite contains anomalous REE (McLemore 2012), but has since dropped the project. Additional surface sampling and staking of mining claims throughout New Mexico has been done by various other companies. New Mexico pegmatites typically are too small to be currently mined for REE. However, residual placers from the pegmatites could have future potential. REE also are found in Cretaceous beach-placer sandstone deposits in the San Juan Basin in northern New Mexico, but these deposits also are too small to be mined economically today. Additional work is required on the episyenites to evaluate their potential, especially for heavy REE.

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Gallery of Geology

Bastnäesite

Bastnäsite [chemical formula is $(Ce,La)(CO_3)F$] in the Red Cloud deposit, Gallinas Mountains district, Lincoln County, New Mexico (length is ~8 mm). Bastnäsite is the most common REE mineral mined in the world today.