

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

MISCELLANEOUS FIELD STUDIES MAP MF-2407-F version 1.0

Map Showing Zinc Concentrations from Stream Sediments and Soils Throughout the
Humboldt River Basin and Surrounding Areas, Northern Nevada
By Douglas B. Yager and Helen W. Folger, 2003

NATIONAL VERTICAL GEODETIC DATUM OF 1929

CONTOUR INTERVAL 500 FEET

SCALE 1:500,000

Base from U.S. Geological Survey, 1965
Lambert Conformal Conic Projection
based on standard parallels 33 degrees and 45 degrees

**The distribution of zinc in stream sediments and
soils in the Humboldt River basin and surrounding area**

In 1995, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Geological Survey identified zinc along with 12 other elements to investigate within the Humboldt River basin located in northern Nevada. These elements are important because of their role as pathfinder elements for mineral deposits or as potential toxins in the environment. This report is one of the 13 separate published reports (MF-2407-A-M) that integrate the results of two geochemical studies conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey and that present geochemical maps created using computer models of stream-sediment and soil geochemistry. The other 12 reports present geochemical maps for Ag, As, Au, Ce, Co, Cu, Fe, Ni, Pb, Sb, Sc, and Se. These geochemical maps provide a visual aid to interpreting the trends and anomalies in element concentration when combined with information about the geology, topography, and mining districts in the Humboldt River basin. The Humboldt River basin is a naturally occurring, internally draining river basin that covers approximately 43,700 square kilometers (16,900 square miles) and forms a substantial part of the larger Great Basin. The Humboldt River basin includes the upper reaches of the Little Humboldt River in Elko County, the Reese River in Lander County, and the main Humboldt River and its many tributaries that flow ultimately westward into the Humboldt Sink. Figure 1 shows

the map area and the Humboldt River basin. Stream-sediment and soil samples originally collected for the NURE (National Uranium Resource Evaluation) program were reanalyzed in 1994 for the Winnemucca-Surprise mineral resource assessment (3,524 samples; King and others, 1996) and in 1996 for the mineral and environmental assessment of the Humboldt River basin (3,626 samples; Folger, 2000) (fig. 2). An additional 206 stream-sediment samples were collected for the Winnemucca-Surprise mineral resource assessment by the USGS to fill gaps in the sample coverage. The combined sample coverage is generally spatially uniform with a sample density of one sample site per 17 square kilometers. Sample density is greatest along range fronts and sparsest along mountain ridges and broad valley bottoms.

Sample analysis

The -80 (<180 micrometers) or -100 (<150 micrometers) sieve mesh grain-size fractions of stream-sediment and soil samples were selected for reanalysis. The samples were prepared and analyzed using a weak acid digestion and organic extraction prior to analysis by inductively coupled plasma-atomic adsorption spectrometry (ICP-AES) (Motooka, 1996). This digestion method cannot dissolve complex silicates and therefore may underestimate the total zinc present in the sample. However, the method does permit measurement at low detection levels. There was one qualified value (below the limit of detection) in the Winnemucca-Surprise and none in the Humboldt River basin datasets. Prior to computing the statistics and subsequent grids, all qualified values were replaced with a value equal to 0.025 ppm. Table 1 contains the statistical profiles and lower limits of determination (LLD) of the two datasets. The histograms in figure 3 illustrate the lognormal distributions of analytical results for samples in the study area. To enhance the continuity of data, the two datasets were combined into a single dataset and plotted on the thematic map.

Zinc (Zn), a trace element and heavy metal, is highly chalcophilic with an affinity to form sulfide minerals; however, it also occurs commonly in carbonates, silicates, and oxides. The chalcophile characteristics of zinc make it a useful "pathfinder" element in the exploration for mineral deposits. It is considered an essential nutrient; however, deficiencies and excesses can cause adverse health affects in humans, wildlife, plants, and especially freshwater biota (Eisler, 1993).

Globally, the concentration of zinc in magmatic rocks ranges from 40 to 120 ppm with zinc being slightly more enriched in the mafic rocks. In sedimentary rocks, argillaceous sediments and shale are enriched (80 to 120 ppm) compared to sandstone and carbonate rocks (10 to 30 ppm) (Kabata-Pendias and Pendias, 1992). Common zinc ore-minerals include sphalerite (ZnS), smithsonite (ZnCO₃), calamine (H₂ZnSiO₅), and zincite (ZnO). Zinc concentrations in the Humboldt River basin range from below detection limits (0.05 ppm) to 14,000 ppm. Zinc is moderately mobile in the environment and tends to be absorbed by organic material and Mn-oxides.

Construction of thematic maps

The thematic map is a useful format for representing the regional variation in geochemical concentration between samples. The approach used for each dataset was to (a) transform every concentration to the logarithm of the concentration for the element and (b) calculate the mean and standard deviation of the log-transformed data. Element concentrations are now expressed as a logarithm and are classified by standard deviations above or below the mean. The standard deviation category for each sample is indicated by a color symbol. Samples with standard deviations below the mean were assigned the "cool" hues of blues and greens, and samples with standard deviations above the mean were assigned the "warm" hues of gold, orange, and red.

A small geochemistry map (fig. 4) was generated from the data using a Geosoft software version of the minimum-curvature algorithm. The minimum curvature algorithm (Briggs, 1974; Webring, 1981) is useful in fitting a surface to closely spaced and gradually varying data while interpolating smoothly between widely spaced data. Data gaps, while conservatively interpolated, may occasionally allow the surface to overshoot or undershoot. Contour intervals on the thematic map are calculated from the minimum curvature grid values and provide an indicator of the generalized spatial continuity of geochemical trends. Contour lines (in brown) left unclosed reflect the sparseness of data available in these areas.

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Figures

Figure 2. Winnemucca-Surprise mineral resource assessment and Humboldt River basin mineral and environmental assessment sample localities in green and red, respectively.

Figure 3. Overlapping histograms of logtransformed zinc values. Humboldt River basin in blue and Winnemucca-Surprise in yellow, and where there is overlap, the histograms are green.

Figure 4. Continuous surface model of Zn analyses.

Table 1. Statistics for zinc. LLD, lower limit of determination; N, number; Dev, deviation.

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