



The weekly brief on the U.S. critical-minerals, rare-earth, and coal build-out, for the people who staff and supply it.

TOP SIGNAL OF THE WEEK

Alaska’s antimony plant is funded, designed, and moving to construction

Nova Minerals (NYSE American: NVA; ASX: NVA) said on July 13, 2026 that it has completed the engineering and design of its antimony pilot processing plant, covering the Whiskey Bravo front-end processing area at the Estelle project, the beneficiation plant and refinery at Port MacKenzie, and supporting infrastructure. The plant is engineered to U.S. Department of War military-grade specifications using the company’s hydrometallurgical process, and the project now enters the execution phase: procurement of the key mining and processing equipment is complete, and more than 40 containers of equipment are en route to Port MacKenzie, with ore extraction and plant construction the next steps. The build-out is fully funded by a \$43.4 million Department of War award to establish a domestic antimony supply chain, with production targeted for late 2026 into 2027. For recruiters and vendors, this is the second U.S. antimony chain moving from paper to plant (after United States Antimony’s Montana smelter, covered in Issue 005), and it sits in Alaska, where nearly every construction trade, plant operator, and metallurgist has to be recruited in or flown in.

Source: [Nova Minerals Corp \(GlobeNewswire\)](#), July 13, 2026; funding and schedule per the company’s [June 22, 2026 Form 8-K](#).

BUILD-OUT & FUNDING MOVES

RARE EARTHS Jul 9

US-funded rare earths are flowing to Japan and South Korea, not yet into American magnets. A Financial Times report, carried by MINING.COM, found that MP Materials (NYSE: MP), Energy Fuels (NYSE American: UUUU), and Phoenix Tailings, which have collectively secured billions of dollars in U.S. government support, are selling much of their output to Japanese and South Korean buyers because domestic magnet manufacturing has not yet scaled. MP sells its neodymium-praseodymium oxide and metal mainly through Sumitomo for Japanese customers and has stopped selling to China; Energy Fuels plans to ship oxides to South Korea and is acquiring Australian Strategic Materials and Germany’s Vacuumschmelze, whose Sumter, South Carolina plant is the largest U.S. magnet plant. The gap, and the opportunity to watch, is domestic magnet-making.

Source: [MINING.COM](#), July 9, 2026, reporting a Financial Times report; company detail per MP Materials and Energy Fuels filings and releases.

TRADE POLICY Jul 13

July 13 marks 180 days since the January 14, 2026 presidential proclamation on processed critical minerals and their derivative products, the Section 232 action that directed the Secretary of Commerce and the U.S. Trade Representative to negotiate mineral-supply agreements with trading partners instead of imposing immediate tariffs. The proclamation calls for a status report to the President within 180 days and reserves the option of further measures, including tariffs and minimum import prices, if agreements are not reached or prove ineffective. Its underlying findings are the market our readers work in: as of 2024 the United States was 100% net-import reliant for 12 critical minerals and at least 50% reliant for another 29. That status report goes to the President, not the public, so this 180-day mark is an internal reporting checkpoint rather than a public deadline; nothing must be announced, and no tariff takes effect automatically at it.

Source: [The White House, presidential proclamation](#), January 14, 2026; 180-day date computed from the proclamation date.

OVERSIGHT Jul 7

Four senior congressional Democrats (Senators Elizabeth Warren, Ron Wyden, and Chris Van Hollen, and Representative Zoe Lofgren) pressed Cantor Fitzgerald and USA Rare Earth (Nasdaq: USAR) over their \$1.6 billion arrangement with the Commerce Department, under which the federal government agreed to take a roughly 10% stake in USAR while the company raised \$1.5 billion in a private offering with Cantor, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick’s former firm, now led by his son Brandon, as placement agent. The lawmakers raised conflict-of-interest and bribery-law questions and asked both companies to produce answers and transaction documents by July 23, 2026. USAR’s magnet ramp is not paused by this, but vendors and candidates around federally backed rare-earth projects should expect oversight noise around equity-stake deals to continue.

Source: [House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology \(Democrats\)](#), July 7, 2026.

FINANCING Jul 10

ReElement Technologies, the Indiana rare-earth refiner slated to feed Vulcan Elements’ magnet plant, has stopped pursuing an \$80 million Department of War loan offered through the Office of Strategic Capital, part of the roughly \$700 million critical-minerals financing package announced last November, after struggling to satisfy federal due-diligence requirements, Reuters reported, citing two administration officials. The company says it will rely on private capital instead (Transition Equity Partners invested \$200 million this year and Mitsubishi Materials agreed to take a stake) and is still exploring federal options under a different structure. The separate \$620 million loan to Vulcan Elements, which plans 10,000 metric tons per year of magnet capacity using ReElement feedstock, remains on track. The lesson for our readers: the mine-to-magnet financing pipeline is real, but not automatic.

Source: [Reuters](#), July 10, 2026.

THE SECTION 232 CLOCK ON PROCESSED CRITICAL MINERALS

1	Proclamation signed January 14, 2026, on processed critical minerals and derivatives	
2	180-day mark reached July 13, 2026	180 days
3	What is due a status report to the President, not to the public	internal
4	Tariffs none imposed; reserved only if negotiations fail The proclamation directs negotiations. The remedy it reserves is minimum import prices.	no rate set

Source: Proclamation 11001 of January 14, 2026, 91 FR 2439; Section 232 action.

HIRING & STAFFING DEMAND

Where projects are ramping and what roles they need, for our recruiter readers.

HIRING Antimony · Alaska

Nova Minerals has completed plant engineering and equipment procurement and says ore extraction and process-plant construction begin this year, across two fronts: the Whiskey Bravo mine-site processing area at Estelle and the beneficiation plant and refinery at Port MacKenzie. Its June update also reported drilling at the Stibium antimony-gold prospect and access-trail, camp, and airstrip work under way. The near-term pull is for construction trades, crusher and process-plant operators, metallurgists, drillers, and camp and logistics staff, in a state where nearly all of that labor must be recruited in.

Source: [Nova Minerals Corp](#), July 13, 2026, and the June 22, 2026 8-K.

HIRING Rare-earth magnets · North Carolina

Vulcan Elements is staffing toward its magnet plant at the Crosspoint Logistics Center in Benson (Johnston County), announced in November 2025 as a \$918 million project with plans for up to 1,000 jobs and 10,000 metric tons per year of magnet capacity, and its federal financing remains on track per the July 10 reporting above. This is exactly the domestic magnet capacity the top of this issue says the country still lacks. Roles to watch: magnet-production operators, sintering and coating technicians, quality and process engineers, and maintenance and electrical technicians.

Source: [Office of the Governor of North Carolina](#), November 18, 2025; loan status per Reuters, July 10, 2026.

HIRING Coal-to-rare-earth · Pennsylvania

Core Natural Resources (NYSE: CNR) confirmed on July 6 that its CONSOL Innovations unit, one of the five DOE coal-to-critical-minerals selections in Issue 005’s top signal, will use the funding to develop a pilot-scale facility recovering rare earth elements and critical materials from coal-waste tailings at the Pennsylvania Mining Complex. Hiring follows award negotiation rather than starting now, but the site is named, one step closer than last week: expect eventual demand for process and chemical engineers, pilot-plant operators, metallurgists, and lab technicians in southwestern Pennsylvania. The grant is contingent on completing negotiations with DOE, and the amount is not yet public.

Source: [Core Natural Resources \(PR Newswire\)](#), July 6, 2026; [U.S. DOE](#), July 1, 2026.

ROLES IN DEMAND THIS WEEK

Nova Minerals Estelle and Port MacKenzie, Alaska *no headcount announced*

Construction tradesCrusher operatorsProcess-plant operatorsMetallurgists

DrillersCamp and logistics staff

Vulcan Elements Benson, North Carolina **up to 1,000**

Magnet-production operatorsSintering techniciansCoating technicians

Quality engineersMaintenance techniciansElectrical technicians

Roles as named or directly implied by each company.

FEATURED COMMODITY EXPLAINER

FEATURED: LITHIUM

Lithium is the workhorse of the battery build-out: 88% of global end use goes to batteries for electric vehicles, grid storage, electronics, and tools. The United States still produces commercial-scale lithium from a single continental brine operation in Nevada and imports the rest, mostly refined in Chile (54% of 2021-24 import supply) and Argentina (43%). The market’s swings are the backdrop to every U.S. project decision: after the 2022 spike, the average U.S. battery-grade lithium carbonate contract price fell to \$9,000 per metric ton in 2025, which USGS reports as a 31% decrease from 2024, even as world production outside the United States rose 31% to about 290,000 tons and global consumption rose 20% to about 263,000 tons; Chinese spot prices firmed through the second half of 2025. The staffing story is the striking part: USGS counts just 70 U.S. lithium mine and mill jobs in 2025, while a single construction site, Lithium Americas’ Thacker Pass Phase 1 in Humboldt County, Nevada, targeting 40,000 tonnes per year of battery-quality lithium carbonate, carries a construction workforce the company has said will exceed 2,000 at peak. When plants like that switch from construction to operations, the operating headcount of the entire U.S. lithium industry will multiply, and USGS’s 30-million-ton U.S. measured-and-indicated resource base says the pipeline behind it is deep.

U.S. LITHIUM JOBS: TODAY VS ONE PROJECT’S PEAK
U.S. LITHIUM AT A GLANCE

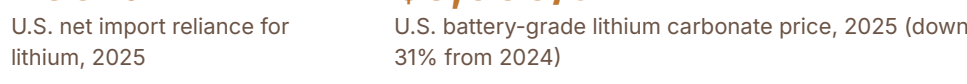
88% of global end use goes to batteries	70 U.S. mine and mill jobs USGS count, 2025	\$9,000 per tonne, 2025 battery-grade carbonate, down 31%	54% / 43% Chile / Argentina of 2021-24 U.S. import supply
--	--	---	---

World production outside the U.S. rose 31% to about 290,000 t; global consumption rose 20% to about 263,000 t.

Data: USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries 2026, Lithium. Chart by Upstream Signals.



Thacker Pass Phase 1 (Nevada) peak construction workforce vs total U.S. lithium mine and mill jobs, 2025.



Figures: [USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries 2026, Lithium](#). Thacker Pass capacity and workforce targets per Lithium Americas.

Subscribe or forward this brief

Was this forwarded to you? [Subscribe here](#).