



Cabinet Resource Group Newsletter

Protecting our natural resources through education and action

Mine Issue: Autumn 2116

Hecla Mining Company Doubles Down: Adds Montanore Mine to Rock Creek Mine

Due to "significant new circumstances", the Cabinet Resource Group request the proposed *Rock Creek Supplemental Draft Environmental Statement (SDEIS)* and *Montanore SDEIS / Record of Decision (ROD)* be reopened for public input .

On June 1st, 2016 the Flathead Beacon reported: "Hecla Vows to Develop Rock Creek, Montanore Mines: The Coeur

d'Alene, Idaho-based company that purchased its second major mine project in Northwest Montana within a year, has vowed to develop both the Rock Creek and Montanore mines." Quoting Hecla spokesperson, "Monique Hayes said the company plans *on simultaneously developing both mines.*"

With its purchase of both properties, Hecla overlooked a number of issues (i.e. policy decision parameters) relevant to the environment. CRG asserts the earlier statements (EIS) do not adequately address the current circumstances of concern to USFS and the citizens affected by development of both these projects.

In March of this year, Hecla sponsored a well-attended public information forum in Noxon, Montana. Hecla's representatives assured the audience of the company's willing-

ness to consider a number of issues that the USFS and MT Dept. of Environmental Quality (DEQ) had overlooked; such as backfilling, lined tailings, impoundments, etc.

This recent purchase, and published intentions by Hecla constitute **significant new environmental and economic concerns** from both proposed Rock Creek and Montanore Mines.

Referenced sources::

*(DSEIS /RCP, page S-1) "According to 40 Code of Federal

**Federal Regulations:
"significant new circumstances demand public input."**

Regulations (CFR) 1502.9(c)(2)a supplemental EIS shall be prepared if : (1) the agency makes substantial changes in the proposed action that are relevant to environmental concerns; or (2) there are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts."

In addition, to ensure a complete analysis of the proposed mining project, *the SEIS will update other resource analyses if there are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and directly relate to the proposed action or its impacts.*"

The above text is an annotated summary of the letter sent to KNF from our President, Cesar Hernandez, August 14th, 2016

Hecla Mining Company and Kootenai Forest release Rock Creek plan *by Lou Springer*

The recently released Rock Creek Draft Environmental Statement (DEIS) includes many improvements. To avoid underground ceiling collapses (which caused the death of one young miner) and the ground to sink above the mine (subsidence) experienced at the Troy Mine, the 'cavern and pillar' design has been toned down to a room and pillar with the height of the rooms limited to no more than 30' and the columns of rock supporting the 'ceiling' are thicker.

Many of the positive changes were a direct result of public concern about water quality. Double lined pipes will transport the contaminated water to be reused in the milling process, then filtered and treated. The tailings will be dewatered from slurry to a paste consistency. There will be monitoring wells and emergency backup systems.

The lack of oversight of the Troy Mine by the permitting agencies—USFS and MT Department of Environmental Quality—has been a major concern of CRG. This was partly because the mining company owned the land above the mine and partly due to lack of consistency within the agencies. Kootenai National Forest, conceding errors of the past, has proposed setting up *Technical Advisory Groups (TAGS)* to follow the activities to ensure Hecla follows all the necessary regulations and approved designs.

Technical Advisory Groups with oversight from the KNF and MT Dept. of Environmental Quality look good on paper, but they lack the power to revoke permits, or shut the mine down if serious problems exist. The agency technicians might as well call themselves *Toothless Advisory Groups*.

Hecla's new computer model, relying upon the improved water treatment systems, shows a dramatic decrease in toxic waste water. Water discharges, containing arsenic, cadmium, copper and lead,

decrease from 2000 gallons per minute to 400. This model includes evaporation and dust abatement spraying of the tools to reach this lower number. Evaporation and spraying are questionable strategies in our cloudy, rainy valley.

Hecla wants to spray 400 gallons per minute to mix with the Clark Fork River below the Noxon dam. Hecla states the Clark Fork is already polluted to the extent that mine wastewater will "*actually be cleaner than the river water itself.*" (Hecla handout; April 2016 public meeting)

However, the condition of the Clark Fork when the water was tested reflects the outflow from the disastrous Mill town dam failure in 1997 that sent Butte copper mining waste our way. The Hecla model expects .07 pounds of arsenic; 1.02 pounds of copper and .14 pounds of lead discharged daily into the river. That is nearly 25 lbs. of arsenic, 50 lbs. of lead per year for 30 years. Dilution only washes the problem downstream, until the heavy metals are blocked by a dam or by a lake.

The tailings impoundment will weigh 100,000,000 tons. It will be less than 300 feet above and less than a mile north of the river and is perched upon Glacier Lake Missoula clay deposits that precariously cling to the steep sides of the Cabinets. Below the tailings impoundment is a region of historically documented instability. The MT Highway Department has been forced to raise the slumping roadbed of Highway #200 east of mm 16 over a dozen times. The highway, the railroad, and the river all lie down the slope from the proposed tailings site.

The lower Clark Fork Valley is the wettest habitable spot in Montana, and often experiences flooding from intense rain-on-snow events. A catastrophic failure of the impoundment due to landslide is an unacceptable risk.

If Hecla's present plan for Rock Creek is followed, the lower Clark Fork Valley will be left with a ticking time bomb of a tailings impoundment which, sooner or later, will slide into the river below Noxon Dam and just above the town of Noxon.

Sooner would be *better*, since Hecla might still be around and be accountable.

Sooner would be *better*, so Super Fund money could employ ex-miners and keep the boom going a little bit longer.

Best would be to **not** place mining waste rock in the river valley.

40 years of questions leave the affected population without answers. Why not backfill the tailings into those empty honeycombs?

Hecla has demonstrated technology and willingness to backfill at their Green River Mine in Alaska. The tailings in Alaska are dewatered, with about 50% of the tailings being mixed with cement and hauled back into the underground mine for disposal as backfill.

Does the Forest Service consider this process "too expensive" to include in the Rock Creek DEIS? If it is too expensive to backfill; what would it cost to clean up a river? A lake?

There is much to appreciate in the new document: the USFS has learned from past experience and Hecla has made a more serious commitment to water quality than the other mining companies. (i.e. double lining the waste water pipes as opposed to Asarco, Sterling/Genesis and Revett.)

Still, the document will not satisfy those people who distrust state and federal agencies to follow through. It will not placate those who are familiar with climate and soils in the valley. It will not satisfy Wilderness proponents who fear land subsidence, and creek dewatering will adversely affect the Cabinet Wilderness Area.

The Kootenai National Forest has released its Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed Rock Creek Mine. This document was revised from the 2001 Record of Decision which gave the go-ahead to begin work on the mine. Cabinet Resource Group and other regional environmental groups appealed the 2001 decision. This action caused fifteen years of scrutiny and rewrites by the agencies.

Go With The Flow by Jim Nash

Hecla promises that any water the Rock Creek mine will discharge will meet DEQ standards in perpetuity. That is a big promise considering the proximity of the tailings to the Clark Fork River and the complexity of the water treatment that has been proposed by Hecla.

The Troy mine is being used as the model for water quality for Rock Creek. The comparison is not accurate, because the monitoring at Troy was inconsistent and test samples were taken a distance below the tailings pond after the soil had acted as a filter bed. There is a treatment process as proposed at Rock Creek.

The Hecla proposal: The chemical laden water from the ore process will be re-circulated through a treatment plant near the river. Some of this treated water would have to be discharged, as clean water is added for ore processing. The treatment plant must also process variable amounts of water from a drain system under the tailings area. A treated discharge of 2200 gallons per minute as first proposed in 2001 has been reduced to 315 gpm by dissipating

it through evaporation, ground seepage and dust suppression. This does not consider seasonal variations, particularly in the spring. Flows from large spring melts could overwhelm the treatment plant; and a complex system of pumps, storage and treatment

The DEIS has stated that there are many unknown factors and the hydraulic engineering is uncertain.

equipment could result in substandard water being discharged into the river.

The proposed discharge point is directly into the Clark Fork River. Avista has reservations about the water quality into the river during thirty years of ore production and into perpetuity. The treatment of the water would eventually end, and the water from the tailings will drain into the river as untreated water. Avista may not grant an easement.

An alternative discharge has been proposed for infiltration of water into the ground below the tailings area. Flows could be well

over 315 gpm and could undermine the highway and railroad. There has not been any engineering or discussion with the railroad or highway department.

Four times per year, both DEQ and Hecla would test discharge water and share results with each other. However, self-monitoring and advance notifications are open to manipulation. Random, unannounced testing with results shared with Avista would be a positive protection. Strict enforcement of water quality and time lines before mine shut down would force Hecla to make good on their promises.

CRG addressed these concerns in the comment period for the preliminary EIS. The final or modified preliminary EIS is the next step. Permitting will not be started until the Phase I exploratory adit is near completion and more information is compiled. Once construction starts with such large investments, regulatory agencies and Avista will feel the pressure to approve permits. As Hecla gets its foot in the door it will be increasingly difficult to stop the degradation of our beautiful mountains.

More Bee Less Ant

The Cabinet Mountain Mines are not like anthills with tunnels throughout. The Troy Mine is a large, underground honeycomb with pillars. The proposed Rock Creek & Montanore mines, similar to Troy, will be huge underground honeycombs. The silver /copper bearing zones are thick; therefore the mining companies decided upon a room and pillar design for all three of the Cabinet Mountains Mines. Both Montanore and Rock Creek ore bodies lie beneath under a Federally protected Wilderness .(1972)

CRG is proud of our talent: meet New Board Members

A second year CRG board member, **Jim Nash** grew up in the Northeast and moved west with his wife, Kathi, when they were in their mid-twenties. Jim's varied careers include education, construction and sawmills. After working in logging camps in Alaska for five years, Jim and Kathi moved to Noxon, Montana in 1984. The couple started Specialty Beams, a successful custom timber sawmill and timber framing company. Recently retired, Jim continues to enjoy hiking the trails in the Cabinet Wilderness Area. As a business owner Jim believes industries in resource extraction can be held accountable to practices that respect the environment while creating profits for their shareholders. He knows development and job creation is possible without sacrificing the environment.

Living in Sanders County for almost 30 years, professional certified mediator **Deb Achatz** has been on the CRG Board of Directors for three years, currently serving as Secretary. Always active in her community, Deb continues her service on the Board of Directors for the Montana Mediation Association, as treasurer for Sanders County Democrats, member of Huckleberry Festival Committee, and Women for a Better Sanders County. She is currently running for HD 13. Deb walks her talk: she believes that strong communities make for a strong county, strong state, and strong USA. Through good education, good health and health-care, safe drinking water, safe disposal of waste, clean air, open spaces, and maintenance of infrastructure, communities can be strong, and we all share in that responsibility.

Thomas B. Humphreys, CDR USN, retired as the Program Director for the Cruise Missile Program, Pt Mugu, California in 1984. Project management, teaching and coaching (baseball, softball, soccer) followed until moving to Noxon, MT in 1998. Having

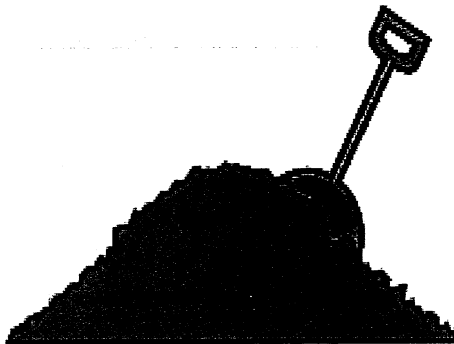
travelled internationally, Tom knows paradise when he sees it: the Cabinet Mountains. A veteran of government and corporate expedience, Tom brings his decades of experience to CRG as a steward for our environment.

Dirty Tricks by Lou Springer

On April 14, 2016, a green mailer fell out of the local newspaper, *The Sanders County Ledger*. It appeared to be an official Forest Service document, but upon further investigation it was **not** from the USFS. The survey asked for an opinion (agree, disagree, no opinion) on twelve 'loaded questions' that were in favor of the proposed mine. This format differs from a petition or statement postcard. It provided three options that ignore the complicated issues. A box was provided for written comments.

Enter the obfuscation; a request for a response from Mike Huffine, Forest Service official in charge of the Rock Creek Project, stating "Please review my answers to the questions and consider this entire document as comments to be included in the official record for the RC SDEIS comment deadline of April 19, 2016. Please notify me, if for any reason, you are unable to include this document and my

comments in the official Rock Creek SDEIS record". This statement appeared at the top of this official looking document.



CRG does not think twelve loaded questions contribute much to the discussion. And neither does the Forest Service. Mike Huffine explained (phone conversation 8/23) that the surveys, placed in the category of form letters, are not of equal weight or standing with thoughtful, substantial questions. Furthermore, only substantive written comments will be addressed in the final document.

The surveys were published by a Libby group, *Environomics*, created by Bruce Vincent, a long time proponent of mining interests

After the Environomics survey's distribution, Cesar Hernandez and Jim Nash met with Hecla's representative, Tim Stiles. He stated that Hecla wanted to be a "Good Neighbor", honest and transparent. Stiles denied any Hecla involvement in the survey. When questioned about Environomics, an outside contractor, acting as Hecla's mouthpiece, Tim Stiles offered no comment.

Shortly thereafter *The Sanders County Ledger* published an article showing mine support from a large majority of the Environomics survey respondents. Apparently, the *Ledger* is willing to use the phony survey to gin up the numbers in favor of mine development.

It is understandable that the local newspaper is in favor of growth, but dear reader, it is your responsibility to bring a big shovel to dig through the dirty tricks.

The environmental impact statement (EIS) done by the Montana Department of State Lands, then the lead agency in such matters, for the Troy mine

was the first EIS ever done for a mine in Montana; only the second in the country. The Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), a carbon copy of the National Act (NEPA), was a shiny new law requiring a study to identify possible negative environmental and socio-economic impacts of any new development, and to seek ways that they could be lessened or avoided.

After 18 months and not inconsiderable expense the Troy mine EIS was completed. At that point, the Montana Department of State Lands (MTDSL) declared that although MEPA required the study to be done, it was merely procedural, not a substantive law, and gave the state no authority to modify or deny a mining permit based on its findings. A permit decision could be based only on the Hard Rock Mining Act, which was then 100 years old.

With the help of the Montana Environmental Information Center CRG sued. Judge Gordon Bennett ruled in our favor. The decision was appealed, but upheld, in even stronger language. At that point, the state ceased arguing that MEPA gave it no authority—but the state did not, and has not used that authority.

Now, some 39 years later, seems a good time to remind agency officials—our employees—of the Bennett decision. Hecla, which now or soon will control both the Montanore and Rock Creek claims, is proposing to mine those ore bodies separately, and concurrently.

When Asarco began construction of the Troy mine, which created hundreds of new jobs, **unemployment** in Lincoln County **increased over 45%**. This was due to the “Gillette Syndrome” named after Gillette, Wyoming, a town devastated by coal and gas development. Part of the description of Gillette Syndrome is that the creation of a large number of jobs in a rural area, in a region with an under-employed and mobile work force, attracts an influx of job-seekers greater than the number of jobs available. This is just one example of how the boom is not an unmixed blessing. Then there’s the bust, when the mines shut and the jobs disappear. What happens when two mines, each employing, say, 350 both play out at around the same time?

Developed in sequence, many workers could transi-

The Bennett Decision; Hecla and Montanore.

By Bill Martin

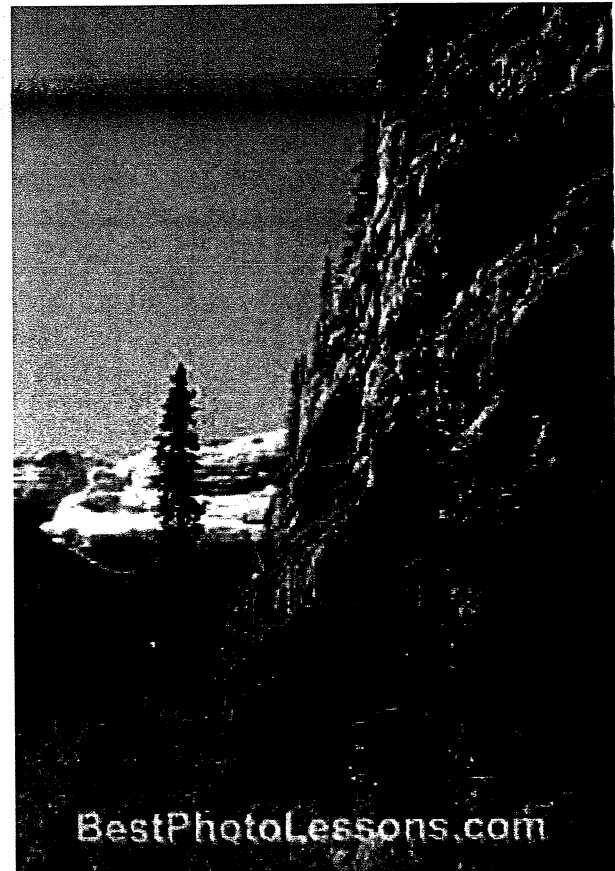
tion from the first to the second mine; the stability of mining as a component of our area’s economy would last twice as long. Boom/bust effects would

be cut by half. If both these mines are permitted, we must push for this.

The Troy EIS said that putting tailings back into the mine would reduce the tailings pond size by 40%. It was not required. What about now? Is it feasible to mine both deposits from a Libby side adit, eliminating disturbance in the Rock Creek drainage?

Such measures would of course increase the cost of mining, but nowhere in the law does it say something can’t be required if it cuts into corporate profits. There is vast wealth under our mountains, and increasing the cost of extracting it, even by some millions of dollars, will not make it unprofitable.

The true treasure is the land itself—the land, the water, the wildlife, and the quality of our lives. It was to protect those things that MEPA was enacted. It’s time to pull it out of the closet, dust it off, and use it as it was meant to be used.



President: Cesar Hernandez,
Polson, 406-210-7146
Vice Pres: Bill Martin,
Troy, 406-295-5258
Secretary: Debra Achatz,
Trout Creek, 406-827-3973
Treasurer: Colleen Hinds,
Heron, 406-847-2209
Director: Tobo Leivestad,
Trout Creek, 827-3981
Director: Tom Humphreys,
Noxon, 406-847-2594
Director: Jim Nash, Noxon,
406-847-5610

*CRG board meetings held
the third Monday monthly.
Call 847-5610 for date,
location and to car pool.
Your concerns, interest
and energies are welcome*

*Donations are tax deductible.
CRG members receive our news-
letter and updates on natural
resource issues. Members are in-
vited to public forums, our an-
nual membership meeting and
monthly board meetings. If you
care about the Cabinets,
our natural resources, and the
people who live here, join us!
We are the grass roots group for
you.*

☺ JOIN US ☺

Return to Cabinet Resource Group, P.O. Box 238, Heron, MT59844

Name:.....

Address:.....Phone &/or email

TownState and Zip:.....

The CRG Newsletter is edited by Martha Humphreys, compiled by Lou Springer, Heron, Mt. All contents © 9/2016 CRG. If you would like respond to an article, send a comment or submit an article, please email nox5594@blackfoot.net or send 440 Elk Creek Rd, Heron.

**Cabinet Resource Group
P.O. Box 238
Heron, Montana 59844**



NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 8

Current Resident, or: