

Lakes panel to hear from mine company

By Keith Kinnaird

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Sandpoint—Developers of the proposed Rock Creek mine in Northwestern Montana are scheduled to meet with Idaho's Lakes Commission on Wednesday.

The meeting is slated to start at 9 a.m. at the Panhandle Health District at 322 Marion Ave. Also on the Pend Oreille Lake, Pend Oreille River, Priest Lake, and Priest River Commission's agenda are updates on lake level management, kokanee populations and chum salmon on the Lower Columbia River.

The Lakes Commission is encouraging the public to attend.

Representatives from Revett Minerals, the company looking to develop the controversial copper and silver mine, are expected to discuss the project's impact to water quality in Idaho. Treated wastewater from the mine would be pumped into the Clark Fork River, which flows into the Pend Oreille.

The mine's arch nemesis, the Sandpoint-based Rock Creek Alliance, has also been asked to address the Lakes Commission.

Meantime, a troubling report has surfaced about mining waste at the existing Troy mine, which is also operated by Revett.

The Missoulian newspaper reported this week that mining waste at Troy's tailings impoundment site appears to be leaking into adjacent wetlands.

Monitoring crews tested the water in the wetlands early this year and discovered that springs which flow into the wetlands show elevated levels of potassium and nitrate, according to the article.

Revett officials, however, say they are not convinced mining is to blame.

In May, a sinkhole emerged over the old workings of the Troy mine.

Rock Creek opponents feared the subsidence at Troy would also plague the proposed mine, but Revett said in August an independent technical review of the problem showed it was not related to previous mining activity.

Mary Mitchell, executive director of the Rock Creek Alliance, said state and federal regulators are not satisfied with Revett's sinkhole report and are looking for money to fund another report.

Mitchell expects to brief the commission on the subsidence issue, in addition to the leaks at Troy's tailing impoundment site.

"I certainly am going to make people aware that that's happened and also bring up the issue of the subsidence report," she said.

"The company is out there still saying that there's nothing wrong at Troy mine and it's blatantly false."