

Revett rebukes "misinformed charges" with mine tour

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SANDPOINT, Idaho -- Revett Minerals Inc. began fighting back last week at what it calls "misinformed charges" about the Rock Creek mine it hopes to develop under the Cabinet Mountains.

The company wants to mine copper and silver in the lower Clark Fork River basin near Noxon. However, the project has been blocked by U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy of Missoula, who ruled that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service failed to adequately consider potential damage to grizzly bears and bull trout before giving the mine a green light.

Revett officials took a dozen north Idaho state and city government officials on tours of the company's Troy mine as well as the proposed Rock Creek site last week. They cited the Troy copper and silver facility as an example of environmentally sound mining, saying Rock Creek would be run the same way.

"The Troy mine is the model for Rock Creek," said Carson Rife, Revett's vice president of operations. "They have similar ore bodies."

He said there is 20 years of data about water quality at Lake Creek, which flows past the Troy mine's tailings. Tests show no degradation to water whatsoever, Rife said.

Still, he and other Revett officials contend that the public perception is skewed toward believing Lake Pend Orielle is in danger from the Rock Creek project.

"We even had some legislators who thought Rock Creek was going to be an open pit, heap-leach mine," Rife said.

After the tours on Wednesday, Sept. 14, Revett officials and their guests dined at a Sandpoint steak house, then watched a power point presentation on Rock Creek by company president and CEO William Orchow. He unveiled results of a poll Revett commissioned about attitudes regarding mining in Montana along with Bonner and Kootenai counties in Idaho.

"This will be the basis for us to begin our campaign," Orchow said. "There are a lot of people who don't have information, and that's what our campaign is going to be."

The poll, conducted in July by Moore Information of Portland, contacted 400 Montana voters via telephone. Initial questioning showed that 49 percent of Montanans supported Rock Creek, 23 percent opposed it, and 28 percent said they didn't know about the project.

Then poll callers read statements that Orchow said "clarified misunderstood issues." Those indicated the mine would not use heap-leach cyanide, would not have a toxic tailings pond,

and would not hurt grizzlies or bull trout, according to Orchow.

"When informed of the facts the people of Montana by a 65 percent to 23 percent margin said they supported the project with only 13 percent now undecided," he said. "This shows that when voters have the real facts they can make an informed decision."

The industry's support is even higher in Lincoln and Sanders counties, Orchow said, where the poll showed 78 percent favor Rock Creek development.

Clay Larkin, the mayor of Post Falls, Idaho, was among those invited on last week's tour. He said he is concerned about the mine's potential affect on the area's aquifer.

However, after seeing the Troy operation and talking with Revett officials, Larkin was willing to consider the project.

"I'll need to think about everything I saw today, but I'm not leaving with negative feelings," he said after Orchow's presentation.

Brad Little, a rancher and state senator from Emmett, Idaho, had an even more positive reaction to Revett's plans. He noted the economic benefits that good-paying jobs would provide, saying mining technology has become sophisticated enough to avoid environmental damage.

"There are still people who want us to produce something," Little said. "Sustainable timber harvesting, environmentally compliant mineral extraction. Mining is a net gainer in the tax situation."

Revett anticipates the mine would have a 25-year lifespan. Another 10 years of work would be required for developing the facility and for remediation when mining was finished.

Rife estimated a \$40-million-per-year benefit to local economies, including state income and property taxes along with wages to employees. Commuting to Rock Creek from Libby or Troy would be possible, he said, citing some workers at the Troy mine who drive from Thompson Falls.

Rife said the company has mitigation plans for potential effects to grizzlies and bull trout. Those include closing five miles of roads, and adding 2,450 acres to permanent wildlife habitat elsewhere.