

## **THE MONTANA STANDARD - NOVEMBER 22, 2005, HELENA GOVERNOR BACKS MINE**

Gov. Brian Schweitzer said Monday a proposed underground silver and copper mine near Troy is "promising," because it lacks many of the environmental problems common in other hard rock mines.

Schweitzer, after listening to an hour-long presentation by leaders of Revett Minerals Inc., of Spokane, said its planned second silver mine in northwestern Montana has two good things going for it:

- It's under ground, thus side-stepping the open-pit scars left behind from many old mines like Butte's Berkeley Pit.
- The water running out of the mine has a neutral ph factor, which means it will not leach out other nearby minerals in the ore. That process, known as acid mine drainage, is one of the biggest and most intractable cleanup problems at many of Montana's defunct hard rock mines.

"That is huge," Schweitzer said, referring to the absence of acid drainage at Revett's proposed Rock Creek mine near Troy.

The company already runs the Troy Mine, an underground copper and silver mine in northeastern Montana. That mine, like the proposed Rock Creek mine nearby, uses bubbles not cyanide to remove metals from the ore. The leftovers are mostly sand, which fill a few hundred acres of bottom land below the mine.

The mine, which could begin the early stages of operation next spring, is not without controversy - much of it coming from nearby Sandpoint, Idaho, but some from local Montana residents, too.

Some are concerned the mine will further disrupt grizzly bear habitat in the Cabinet Mountains. Others are concerned the sandy tailings from the mine would foul the Clark Fork River, which rolls into Idaho's Lake Pend Oreille, on the banks of which sits Sandpoint.

Revett officials Bill Orchow, president and chief executive officer, and Carson Rife, vice president of operations, told Schweitzer Monday they've already committed to spending around \$20 million over the life of the mine to buy new grizzly bear habitat, close roads and other actions that will more than offset the mine's relatively small 482-acre footprint.

Rife has publicly said before that real estate development and golf courses have not committed to similar actions to offset development's effects on bear habitat.

Schweitzer said one of his biggest concerns is the possible effect mining may have on Cliff Lake, a Montana lake that sits above the proposed mine shaft. Mining below the lake could drain the lake as waters find fissures down into the shaft.

Rife told Schweitzer they would not mine within 1,000 feet of either side of the lake.

Schweitzer said after the meeting, he still has concerns. He also asked if the company could backfill the shaft with the sandy tailings.

Rife said the company has not ruled out backfilling and is still looking for a way to use the sand commercially so it will create less mining refuse.

Schweitzer said he thought it ironic that Idaho's Republican Gov. Dirk Kempthorne, long a supporter of logging, logging roads and general resource development, now resists the Troy Mine. Schweitzer suggested Kempthorne's stance may have something to do with the wealthy people who live around Lake Pend Oreille.

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