

THE GIBRALTAR MINE: First Nation and Fishery Concerns

Background:

The Gibraltar Mine is an open pit copper molybdenum mine acquired by Taseko Mines Limited in 1999.¹ Taseko and Northern Dynasty are sister companies owned by the Hunter Dickenson Group.² The Gibraltar mine site covers approximately 109 square kilometers, and is located in south-central British Columbia.³



Wastewater Discharge to the Fraser River:

Historically the mine operated without a discharge to surface waters, storing the polluted runoff in the tailings impoundment and the pit. However, in 2005, the company determined there was no more room to store the wastewater, and applied for a permit to discharge it from the tailings impoundment into the Fraser River.⁴ The wastewater contains pollutants, such as total dissolved solids, sulphate, aluminum, copper and molybdenum. The permit authorizes the mine to discharge approximately 3,000 gallons per minute of wastewater into the river – with a maximum of 5 million cubic meters of wastewater a year.⁵

Fishery Concerns & First Nation Opposition:

The wastewater discharge is located in an area of the Fraser River that supports many species of fish; threatened white sturgeon, bull trout, interior coho salmon, chubs, suckers, and more.⁶ The local First Nation, the Xats'ull, have traditionally harvested fish in the Fraser River for subsistence. The Xats'ull First Nation strongly opposes the discharge permit, and filed an appeal of the permit with the BC Environmental Appeals Board (EAB) in May 2006, stating that it:⁷

- Failed to adequately determine the effects of the discharge on resident fish species,
- Established discharge criteria that were not sufficiently protective of species at risk, such as white sturgeon, bull trout and interior coho salmon.
- Failed to consider cumulative impacts of other discharges in the Fraser River,
- Required inadequate effluent sampling requirements and inadequate environmental effects monitoring,
- Did not take into consideration established land use plans, and
- Inadequately consulted with the Xats'ull First Nation.

A decision from the BC Environmental Appeals Board is pending. The appeal also raises on-going concerns about wind-blown dust from the tailings impoundment. In the meantime, Taseko has posted a reclamation bond of \$18.5 million in a Reclamation Trust. As part of the reclamation plan they will establish a landfill site on the old waste rock dumps.⁸

Important Differences:

There are also a number of important differences to keep in mind when comparing the proposed Pebble Mine and fisheries impacts, with the existing Gibraltar Mine.

- The Gibraltar Mine is not constructed on top of salmon spawning or rearing habitat.⁹ Whereas, the Pebble Mine would be constructed directly on top of salmon producing tributaries to Bristol Bay's most productive salmon systems – the Nushagak and Kvichak.¹⁰
- The Gibraltar mine tailings are not placed within fish habitat.¹¹ In contrast, tailings from the Pebble mine would cover Frying Pan Lake – established coho salmon and northern pike habitat.¹²
- The Gibraltar Mine, at 36,000 tons per day, is much smaller and generates less waste than the proposed Pebble Mine, at 100,000-200,000 tons per day.¹³

References:

¹ Taseko Mines website: www.tasekomines.com

² Hunter Dickenson website: <http://www.hgold.com/hdi/Companies.asp>

³ Taseko Mines website: www.tasekomines.com

⁴ Amended Permit PE-00416, April 12, 2006. Issued by the British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Environmental Protection, Cariboo Region, Williams Lake, BC V2G 4T1

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ British Columbia Environmental Appeal Board, 2006-EMA-006, Notice of Appeal between Xats'ull First Nation and Director, Environmental Management Act and Gibraltar Mines Ltd., May 23, 2006.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Taseko Mines Ltd., TKO – Q1-2005, Report to the Securities and Exchange Committee. P. 30.

⁹ <http://www.cmNBC.ca/>

¹⁰ Renewable Resources Coalition, Trout Unlimited and True North GIS, Map of the Proposed Pebble Mine and Relationship to Observed Fish Populations, based on Fisheries Report in reference to Permit No. 8F-2004-114 and Amendment No. 8F-2004-114-A-1 from HDR Alaska, Inc. to Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game.

¹¹ <http://www.cmNBC.ca/>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ http://www.ndmpebblemine.com/project_information/overview_history;