

Red Devil Mine

Environmental Investigation Update

June 2014

This newsletter provides updates on the environmental project at the Red Devil Mine, an abandoned cinnabar mine and mercury production facility on the Kuskokwim River. A complete record of documents for this investigation, including previous newsletters, is available at www.blm.gov/ak/red_devil_mine.

Since late 2009, the BLM has investigated the Red Devil Mine site to better understand contaminants left by past mining activity and how those contaminants interact with the local soil, water and sediment to create potential risk to humans and the environment. The results of this Remedial Investigation show that mine tailings adjacent to Red Devil Creek are an ongoing source of mercury, arsenic and antimony.

The BLM will take action at the Red Devil Mine site this summer to prevent the mine tailings from continuing to erode into Red Devil Creek. The action will stabilize the ongoing movement of tailings until site-wide remedial action can be performed. The EPA, ADEC and three other State agencies participated in the planning and community outreach the BLM completed as part of this early action.

Community Involvement

Community involvement, including tribal consultation, remains an important part of this investigation. Earlier this spring, the BLM contacted communities in the middle and lower Kuskokwim region to offer tribal consultations and community meetings about a proposed early action to prevent further erosion of the tailings. The early action would precede site-wide remedial action.

The communities of Akiak, Bethel, Chuathbaluk, Crooked Creek, Kalskag, Lower Kalskag, Red Devil and Sleetmute accepted the BLM's invitation to meet. More than 150 residents attended the community meetings and shared comments, questions and concerns about the proposed action.

While the level of interest and concern about the Red Devil Mine site varied, a few themes emerged:

- Comments and questions about the design features of the proposed action, and how heavy snowpack and spring flooding might affect the tailings stockpile and retention pond
- Concerns that the early action wouldn't provide a long-term solution to contaminants at Red Devil
- Ongoing concerns about mercury levels in Kuskokwim fish and impacts to human health
- Use of local resources such as crews and heavy equipment during proposed work at the site

Overall, communities concurred with the preferred alternative and were pleased the BLM was moving forward with a plan to prevent the tailings from further eroding into Red Devil Creek. At the same time, they were very interested in a long-term plan for addressing contaminants at the site.

PHOTOS: Red Devil Mine ore processing facility, 1943 (top); community meetings in Kalskag (center) and Lower Kalskag (left), March 2014.



Planned Early Action

The BLM considered three different alternatives to prevent tailings migration and a fourth no action alternative. Each action alternative included moving the steepest tailings piles away from the creek and constructing a physical barrier along the edge of the creek to prevent erosion.

- Alternative 1: No Action
- Alternative 2: Place concrete cloth in the section of the creek adjacent to the tailings piles.
- Alternative 3: Install culvert pipe in the section of the creek adjacent to the tailings piles.
- Alternative 4: Realign the creek adjacent to the tailings piles, line the sides with gabion (a retaining wall of stones inside heavy wire mesh) to prevent erosion, and construct a sediment trap downstream as an additional safeguard against tailings migration in the creek.



Collapsed bridge and mine tailings at Red Devil Creek

Based on technical feasibility, input from communities, and the concurrence of other agencies, the BLM selected Alternative 4 for the 2014 action. The BLM contracted with Marsh Creek LLC to construct the project. The contractor will mobilize in June, with equipment and material needed to complete the project scheduled to arrive at the Red Devil site in late June through early July. Construction will continue through early August.

Due to the potentially hazardous nature of the tailings, the BLM requests that people not visit the site, particularly during construction when heavy equipment will be active.

Feasibility Study and Proposed Plan

The BLM continues to work in coordination with the EPA, ADEC and three other State agencies to draft the Feasibility Study (FS) for the Red Devil Mine site. When complete, the FS will define four alternatives, including a no action alternative, for site-wide remedial action. Similar to the process used to select a preferred alternative for the early action, the FS will evaluate the technical feasibility of each alternative and compare them with each other.

Once the FS is complete, the BLM will develop a Proposed Plan that summarizes the Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study and identifies a preferred site-wide remediation alternative. The draft Proposed Plan is projected to be ready for presentation to interested communities in spring 2015. Once the BLM receives input from tribes and communities, we will begin work on a Record of Decision to define what action(s) will be taken, applicable cleanup levels and monitoring requirements.

How to Stay Informed

Visit the project website for updated information as the planned field work progresses. We'll also develop a fall newsletter to update communities about how the early action went and whether the planned work was completed.

When the Proposed Plan for site-wide remediation is ready for public review and comment, we'll again offer community meetings and tribal consultations to discuss the plan and invite your comments and concerns. Please consider if you would like the BLM to meet with your community at that time.



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