

The Daily Courier

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Proposed Kirkland mine will be topic of meeting Thursday

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Kirkland residents will have an opportunity to discuss a proposed mine Thursday, May 14, with U.S. Bureau of Land Management officials.

BLM Hassayampa Field Office Manager Rem Hawes said he will attend a community meeting organized by Yavapai County Supervisor Rowle Simmons, whose district includes the rural community of Kirkland south of Prescott. It starts at 6 p.m. at the Skull Valley Community Center, 3150 Old Skull Valley Road. Mining company owners said they will be unable to attend.

The Kirkland Mining Company has applied to the BLM to reprocess about 42,000 tons of old volcanic tuff rock stockpiles located on about three acres of BLM land between Kirkland and Skull Valley near the Kirkland-Skull Valley Road (Iron Springs Road), Hawes said, adding that the tailings are not toxic right now.

The application is in the early stages so the BLM hasn't formally solicited public comment yet.

The mine used to be used for kitty litter ingredients but has been dormant since the 1980s, Hawes said.

"We're essentially just going in and cleaning up what's already there," Kirkland Mining Company Vice President Areta Zouvas said.

The company has owned the rights to mining claims on a total of 320 contiguous acres for 28 years, Zouvas said. It's working on a mining plan for the entire 320 acres. It probably will take a decade to mine five acres at a time, she added. All of it will be surface mining.

The tuff rock has numerous environmentally friendly uses and her company has narrowed it to four, Zouvas said: a cement ingredient, soil amendment, water filtration and waste remediation, since it absorbs oil spills and toxins.

The larger plan will involve much more environmental analysis if the company submits that to the BLM, Hawes said.

Recent survey work has attracted the attention of neighbors. About 8-10 homes are located within about a mile of the tailings now, Hawes estimated. Zouvas said she met with about 20 community members earlier this month when they requested it.

"Some of them were pleased, and some were not pleased," she said.

Allison Dixon, who said she lives a couple miles away, is among those who are not pleased.

She has created a website at kirklandmineforum.org to publish information about the mine and its history. She said her biggest concern is destruction of the environment where she has enjoyed

hiking for the past two decades.

"It's a beautiful little canyon" with flowing water, she said of a Copper Basin Wash canyon that she believes is within the mine survey stakes and about one-eighth of a mile from the tailings piles. Some of the survey markers sit right next to private land, she added.

"If they're going to put an open pit mine in our quiet little valley, people are going to have a problem with that," Dixon said.

Potential concerns include hazardous dust, noise, increased traffic, bright lights and obliteration of a scenic landscape, her website states.

Mike Bennett lives even closer, about a quarter-mile from the tailings. He said when he moved there in 2010, he was told the mine had been closed more than 30 years and it probably wouldn't reopen because the tailings were toxic.

"I don't want to see them open up," he said. "It's peaceful and I'm concerned about the noise level, I'm concerned about my well."

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