Red Devil Mine

February 2016

BLM

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.

Red Devil Mine Proposed Plan

From 2009-2014, the BLM conducted a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study of Red Devil Mine, located on the middle Kuskokwim River in southwest Alaska. The results confirmed that the tailings at Red Devil Mine contain high concentrations of mercury, arsenic and antimony and these contaminated tailings have migrated down Red Devil Creek into the Kuskokwim River.

The BLM addressed tailings migration in Red Devil Creek as part of an Early Action in 2014. The action included realigning a portion of Red Devil Creek, moving the largest tailings pile away from the creek, and constructing a retention basin in the creek downstream to catch future eroded tailings. This action stabilized the movement of tailings until site-wide remediation can be performed.

The BLM is now preparing a Proposed Plan that analyzes three alternatives for treating the tailings, waste rock, soil and creek sediment. The plan includes a preferred alternative that would provide a long-term health protective remedy for contaminants at Red Devil Mine. The BLM is focusing on the tailings and impacted soil because that is the primary source of mercury, arsenic and antimony at the site. The BLM is continuing to assess groundwater and sediments in the Kuskokwim River. A report summarizing those results and an assessment of remedial action for groundwater and river sediments will be available for review in 2016.

While mercury and antimony are contaminants of concern at Red Devil, arsenic is the contaminant that poses the greatest potential risk to human health and the environment at the Red Devil Mine site. Arsenic is a naturally occurring element that becomes greatly concentrated through the mining and extraction process. The goal of cleanup activities at Red Devil is to reduce the risk to people and animals caused by exposure to arsenic, mercury and antimony.

PHOTO AT TOP: Red Devil Mine ore processing facility, 1943

CENTER: Red Devil Mine ore sample. Cinnabar is red mineral containing mercury; realgar is orange mineral containing arsenic.

LEFT: Tribal members discuss the Red Devil Mine project with the BLM during the 2015 Annual Tribal Gathering at Lower Kalskag.

Anchorage Field Office

What is CERCLA?

The BLM is using a process defined under the **Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act** (CERCLA), also known as Superfund, to investigate and treat contaminants at Red Devil Mine.

In 2008 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) determined that the Red Devil Mine site was eligible for Superfund listing. In 2009 the BLM initiated the CERCLA investigation, the same process the EPA uses to clean up Superfund sites.

The BLM coordinates closely with the EPA, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, and other state and federal agencies during each phase of this project. The BLM also coordinates with The Kuskokwim Corporation and Calista Corporation, the selected landowners under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

Contaminants of concern are those which have been shown through analysis to pose the greatest risk to plants and animals at a contaminated site. Contaminants of concern are identified as part of risk assessment during CERCLA investigations.

Background levels are concentrations of elements such as arsenic or mercury that occur naturally, not as the result of human activities such as mining. The Kuskokwim region is sometimes called the “mercury belt” of Alaska due to the numerous mercury deposits in the area.

Remediation is an action or set of actions to remove or contain hazardous materials at a contaminated site. Remediation typically involves some combination of removal, treatment or containment.

Landfill, monofill and repository: A landfill is a place where waste material is disposed of by burying it and covering it with soil. A monofill is a landfill primarily for only one type of waste. A repository is an engineered structure where large volumes of waste material are placed, usually above the natural land surface.

Public Comment Period

The BLM plans to release the Proposed Plan for public comment in March 2016. The BLM will offer a 60-day public comment period and hold public meetings in interested communities along the Kuskokwim River and in Anchorage.

The BLM will send letters of invitation to federally recognized tribes, city governments, and Alaska Native corporations throughout the middle and lower Kuskokwim River to offer consultations and public meetings during the comment period. Please consider if you would like the BLM to meet with your community or if you would like to attend the Anchorage public meeting.

The BLM will work with communities to develop the public meeting schedule and will announce meetings in the local media and on the Red Devil Mine website. Flyers will also be posted in communities to announce the dates and times of meetings.

If you cannot attend a public meeting, you may review and comment on the Proposed Plan by visiting the project website or request that the BLM mail you a printed copy of the plan.

How to Stay Informed

If you received this newsletter by mail, the BLM will notify you when the Proposed Plan is available for comment. You may comment during a public meeting or offer comments via email or regular mail during the public comment period.

Your comments and suggestions were helpful to the BLM during earlier cleanup actions at the site. We invite your continued participation as we move toward a long-term cleanup plan for Red Devil Mine.

How to Contact Us

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