

# ROCK CREEK ALLIANCE

## FROM OUR MOUNTAINS TO OUR LAKE

Hope

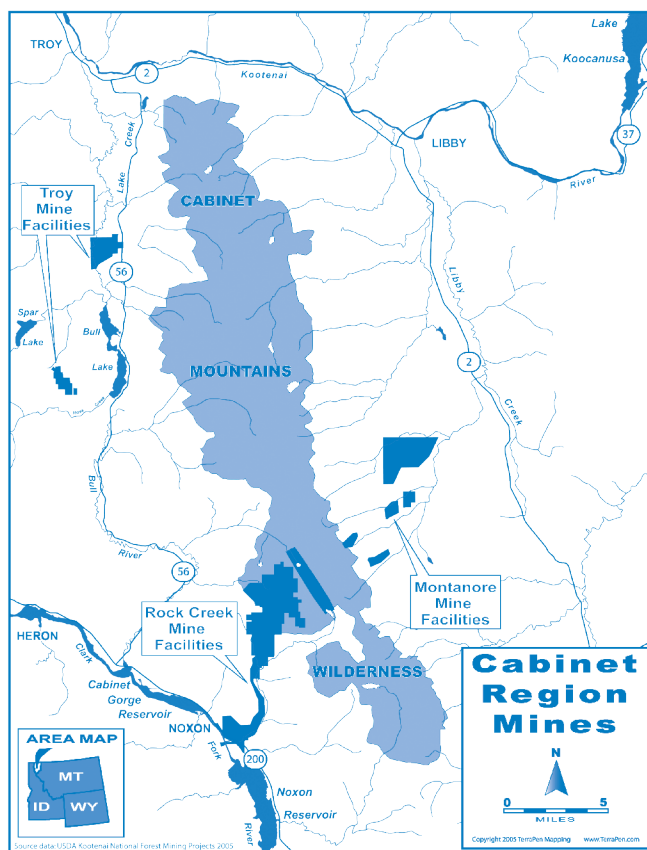
### Revett's Troubled Troy Mine

The Troy mine is a copper/silver mine located in Lincoln County, Montana and is approximately 70 miles northeast of Sandpoint. The industrial project is owned by Revett Minerals, which is the same company that is pursuing a permit for the Rock Creek mine. Revett's Troy mine has been operating on and off since 1980, and has had its share of environmental problems including numerous water quality violations and multiple incidences of rock falls and cave-ins.

In lieu of site-specific data for Rock Creek on geochemistry, rock mechanics, and other crucial areas, the Troy mine is often used as an analog for what is to be expected at Rock Creek. Unlike the Troy mine, Rock Creek would extract ore from beneath the lakes, streams, and wetlands of a federally protected wilderness area. This has never been done before, and with good reason. There is little margin for error.

When comparing the two mines, it should be noted that the Rock Creek mine also would be significantly larger than the Troy mine. That means more waste rock and mine tailings piled onto public lands, and more wastewater discharged into the streams and rivers of the region. In this case, bigger is not better.

Issues related to rock mechanics, including rock fall, slumping, and ground subsidence, have plagued the Troy mine. Tragically, a miner was killed in 2007 from a rock fall incident due to the company's failure to ensure adequate ground support systems. More recently, in late 2012, extensive rock fall and subsidence made the underground cavern inaccessible and unsafe, resulting in the mine's closure. The media reported that excessive rainfall and freezing temperatures were being blamed, but underground faults



also may have contributed to the problems. Today, the Troy mine remains closed and it may be a year or more before it is re-opened.

As far back as 1999, the Alliance has raised concerns about the highly fractured nature of the bedrock surrounding the proposed Rock Creek mine. We have maintained that the probability of cave-ins and subsidence is high at Rock Creek, and recent events at Troy have justified our concerns.

The most recent occurrence of rock fall and subsidence was accompanied by a crack in the ceiling of the mine cavity that extended 900 feet vertically to the surface. If this were to happen from mining operations (Rock Creek or Montanore) beneath the wilderness, lakes like Cliff Lake and Rock Lake could be significantly impacted. Mining Rock Creek's highly fractured ore body could cause a collapse of wilderness lands and lead to a "pulling of the plug" of wilderness waters.



Cliff Lake photo by Woods Wheatcroft

Continued

Hope



### *Revett's Troubled Troy Mine Continued*

Ironically, in recent years, Revett Minerals has been promoting its safety and environmental record at Troy. Not surprisingly, the company has downplayed the incidents and the multiple fines (nearly \$1 million) that have been levied by the Mine Safety and Health Administration.

Having yet to prove that it can safely operate the smaller Troy mine, the company continues to push for Rock Creek. Considering Revett's recent track record, using the geology and safety record at Troy as an analogy for Rock Creek is probably not the best strategy for Rock Creek mine proponents.

As we have done in the past, we will continue to push the agencies to address rock mechanics and other critical issues at Rock Creek that have been ignored, and to make information about these risks available to the public.

## Status of the Supplemental Final EIS



*Lake Pend Oreille was designated "A Health and Recreation Place" by the Idaho Legislature. We plan to keep it one!*

The latest estimate from the Forest Service is that the Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement (SFEIS) for the Rock Creek mine will be completed and released to the public in December 2014. The supplemental document was required as a result of our 2010 victory in federal court that led to the revocation of the 2001 FEIS and the 2003 Record of Decision issued by the Forest Service.

The SFEIS must address environmental impacts from the proposed Rock Creek mine including those related to water quality and bull trout. The Alliance has asked the Forest Service to take a detailed look at the potential hydrologic consequences of extracting ore from beneath wilderness lakes and streams. We also would like the SFEIS to explain how the current rock mechanics issues at the Troy mine apply to Rock Creek.

The original release date for the SFEIS was fall of 2012. We will keep you posted on the actual release date and the accompanying public comment period.

## Corporate Changes for Revett Minerals

In late November, Revett Minerals began construction of a new access tunnel into its Troy mine. Previously used adits have been deemed unsafe because of significant rock fall and subsidence. The construction effort to reach the ore body is expected to take approximately one year, and cost the cash-strapped company \$12 million.

The company is also changing its corporate name from Revett Minerals, Inc. to Revett Mining Company, Inc. with an

incorporation jurisdiction move from Toronto to Delaware. Corporate offices would remain in Spokane. The corporate restructuring is aimed at saving the company money.

The year-long closure of Revett Mineral's Troy mine from structural problems has not deterred the company from continuing its aggressive pursuit of Rock Creek. This is in spite of the need to spend \$12 million dollars for the construction of the new Troy adit, plummeting metals prices, and a steep drop in the company's stock value following news of the Troy mine worker layoffs and subsequent closure.





## Our View

Collaboration seems to be the new buzzword in the environmental and conservation movement. According to the Oxford Dictionary, collaboration can be “the action of working with someone to produce or create something.” This cooperative process was used in 1964 to give us the Wilderness Act that protected the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness.

Unfortunately, those same negotiations, 50-years past, enabled mining companies to stake claims in proposed wilderness resulting in modern day mining proposals. In order to get the legislation through congress, wilderness proponents made specific exceptions in drafting the bill’s language to satisfy the mining industry. These “loopholes” opened the door for the Rock Creek and Montanore mines.

Collaboration certainly has its place within the conservation

movement, but participants need to tread carefully. According to Oxford, collaboration can also mean “traitorous cooperation with the enemy.” In their zealotry and haste to create a specific public image or to achieve a single goal by any means necessary, some environmental groups are forgetting their original purpose.

We as conservationists, love wilderness, clean water, and wildlife. While we work with specificity to protect a wild place, a lake, or a species, we must maintain a guiding principle that all wilderness, clean water, and wildlife are sacred. Maybe it is a question of “old school” ethics versus the new age of collaboration. In our view, wilderness and clean water are not commodities to be bartered, sold, or swapped.

### Show Your Support with a Rock Creek Alliance Ball Cap!

You can show your support for Rock Creek Alliance and Lake Pend Oreille with this high quality, made in the USA ball cap! Hats are a charcoal colored washed twill. Each one has an embroidered six-color patch featuring the logo created by Ron Berg for the Jackson Browne concert in 1999. These hats were embroidered in Missoula and purchased from a local business in Thompson Falls, Montana. While they cost a bit more than some hats, we think supporting local businesses and made in the USA products is important. Hats are \$20 and are available in Sandpoint at Outdoor Experience, or via direct mail for \$23. Contact us for more information at [info@rockcreekalliance.org](mailto:info@rockcreekalliance.org), or 406-827-4896.



### Save Our Cabinets Ball Caps Feature Our Striking Logo

Like our grizzly bear logo? Created by Tracy Martin, this logo is extremely popular. Save Our Cabinets has handsome olive twill ball caps featuring our striking logo as an embroidered four-color patch. These hats, purchased from a small Montana business, were embroidered in Missoula. They are available for \$15 at Sports Plus and Outdoor Experience in Sandpoint, or via direct mail for \$18. Call or email us if you would like to order your hat directly from us: [info@rockcreekalliance.org](mailto:info@rockcreekalliance.org) or 406-827-4896.



## An Update from Save Our Cabinets

### The Endangered Species Act

#### Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of a Law that has Protected Countless Species Nationwide

On December 28, 1973, President Richard Nixon signed the Endangered Species Act (ESA) into law to protect rapidly disappearing American wildlife. Iconic species such as the grizzly bear and bald eagle were being hunted, trapped, and poisoned into extinction.

At the same time, the habitat of our native wildlife was being logged, mined, and developed at a frightening pace. In 1973, an enlightened government decided it was time to act because without bold legislation, countless species would be gone. The Endangered Species Act was thus born.

The now forty-year old legislation continues to be a work in progress. In 2014, some in Congress see the ESA as an impediment to economic prosperity and want to abolish the law or weaken it to the point of ineffectiveness.

Close to home, the Endangered Species Act is charged with maintaining healthy populations of the eagles that perch in the cottonwood trees along the shores of Lake Pend Oreille, the bull trout that swim in our streams, and the grizzly bears that make their home in the Selkirk and Cabinet Mountains.

So, just how well has the law performed locally? We know Bald Eagles have made an amazing comeback and were delisted, but bull trout and grizzly bears are still struggling.

#### Grizzly Bears Then and Now

In 1804, when Lewis and Clark headed west along the Missouri River, there were an estimated 50,000 grizzly bears wandering the wilderness from the Pacific Ocean to the Great Plains. By 1922, there remained 37 individual populations of grizzly bears in the western United States. By 1975, there were only 1,500 bears surviving in five small regional populations.

Mining, road building, and motorized recreation have driven the species into the last remnants of wilderness in Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Wyoming. Today, the species can be found only in the Greater Yellowstone area, the Northern Continental Divide,

the North Cascades, the Selkirk and Purcell Mountains, and the Cabinet/Yaak Ecosystem.

Grizzly bears were listed under ESA as a threatened species in 1975. The grizzly bear population has slowly increased around Glacier and Yellowstone Parks, but the number of bears in the Cabinet/Yaak continues to decline because of habitat loss and poaching. For the few bears remaining in the Cabinet/Yaak, the absolute protection and expansion of the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness is the key to preserving the small population.

#### Bull Trout

This native trout have been extirpated from many of the regional streams it once occupied. The demise of the bull trout has resulted, in part, from the introduction of sediment and metals into streams from road building, logging, and mining.

Proposed mining in the region of the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness would increase sediment and/or metals into bull trout streams such as Rock Creek and the East Fork of Bull River. An additional impact from the Rock Creek and Montanore mines is the dewatering of streams that currently provide habitat for the species. Year round streams like the East Fork of Bull River would go dry because of mine related diversion of groundwater.

#### Ensuring Our Future and Theirs

Protecting bull trout and grizzly bears, and the habitat necessary to sustain viable populations, has been the focus of much of the litigation on the Rock Creek mine. By advocating for clean water for bull trout and secure habitat for bears, we also are ensuring that our lake and wilderness will be unspoiled by mining for generations to come.





## Land Management in the Kootenai National Forest

On October 23, 2013, the Draft Record of Decision for the Kootenai National Forest's Draft Land Management Plan (DLMP) was released to the public. The Kootenai National Forest is the land management agency responsible for the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness (CMW) and one of the primary permitting agencies of both the Rock Creek and Montanore mines.

The purpose of the DLMP is to provide land management direction for the Kootenai National Forest. An important part of the planning process debate has been whether the remaining Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) within the forest should remain non-motorized, should permit motorized access, or be recommended for wilderness protection. The DLMP (Alternative B) has proposed to designate approximately 84% of the Kootenai National Forest as motorized; the remaining would be either existing wilderness, recommended wilderness, or non-motorized.

The DLMP recommends adding 29,900-acres to the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness. Omitted from protection under the DLMP were most of the Inventoried Roadless Areas adjacent to the southeastern portion of the CMW. Under the Forest Service's chosen alternative, roadless areas such as Galena Creek, Allen Peak, and Barren Creek would become open to motorized use. These three IRAs are important because they provide good habitat for grizzly bears and provide a secure corridor for bears



*The Cabinet Divide Trail in the Galena Creek Inventoried Roadless Area*

to migrate between the Cabinets and the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem to the east.

Save Our Cabinets and Rock Creek Alliance submitted comments during the drafting process and issued objections when the Record of Decision was released. Our concerns focused on the lands adjacent to the southern portion of the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness and their importance as wildlife habitat. Hardrock mining remains a very viable threat to the wilderness, and the DLMP is an opportunity to help offset some of the potential mining impacts. Without changes, the land management plan could actually exacerbate future mining impacts by removing protections from important wildlife habitat.

Stay tuned. We will let you know if there is a future opportunity for public involvement on this issue.

## Montanore Mine Final EIS Expected this Spring or Summer

According to the Kootenai National Forest, the agency is targeting May or June 2014 for the release of a Final EIS for the proposed Montanore mine. Like the Rock Creek mine, Montanore would tunnel beneath the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness and impact streams within the Clark Fork River Drainage. (See map on Page 1 for the location of this proposed mine.) The massive copper/silver mine is predicted to cause significant dewatering of the East Fork of Bull River, the East Fork of Rock Creek, and Rock

Lake. Impacts from the Montanore mine would exacerbate those already predicted from the Rock Creek mine.

The owners of the Montanore mine, the Spokane-based Mines Management, recently suffered a setback when a Montana court determined the company does not have valid ownership of all of the claims near an existing 14,000-foot evaluation adit. This tunnel was constructed in the early 90's to access the ore body.

*Continued*





*Montanore Mine Final EIS Expected  
this Spring or Summer Continued*



*Montanore Mine Evaluation Adit*

The court ruled that some of the mining claims near the entrance to the adit belong to other claims holders. Mines Management has appealed this decision to the Montana Supreme Court. Without full access to the evaluation adit, the company may be unable to reach the ore body via the already constructed tunnel. At this time, it is unclear why the Forest Service is moving forward with the Final EIS, given the uncertainty surrounding the company's mining claims.

The interplay of the Rock Creek and Montanore mines is extremely complicated. To date, the Forest Service has refused to address cumulative impacts to water, wilderness, and wildlife, in spite of the fact that the Kootenai National Forest is simultaneously working on Final Environmental Impact Statements and permitting decisions for both mines.



*Rock Creek Meadows*

## **Plans to Motorize the Rock Creek Trail:**

**Good News for Mining Interests;  
Bad News for Hikers**

How many of us have taken the 5-mile hike along the East Fork of Rock Creek to Rock Lake? The most popular destination in the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness, hiking to Rock Lake is an annual pilgrimage for many. Unfortunately, the Draft Land Management Plan of the Kootenai National Forest proposes to motorize a significant portion of this trail.

The decision to motorize the Rock Creek Trail was undoubtedly made so that mining companies would have better access to the region along the East Fork of Rock Creek. Mines Management owns claims near Rock Lake, and its proposed Montanore mine would need (if permitted) to install a ventilation adit close to the trail, near the wilderness boundary and Rock Lake.

There are additional mining claims along the Rock Creek Trail. The potential for future development of these claims may also have been a consideration in designating the trail as motorized.

The cost of motorizing that trail would be significant for grizzly bears and hikers alike. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), in its 2006 Biological Opinion for the Rock Creek mine, stated that heavy use of the Rock Creek Trail by hikers could significantly





impact essential grizzly bear habitat in the region. The agency expressed concerns that too many hikers could displace the bears, which avoid human activity. The USFWS also proposed restricting hiking use to mitigate impacts from the mine. Ironically, motorizing the Rock Creek Trail would have significantly more impacts to grizzly bears than hikers and horses ever could.

In our comments on the Draft Land Management Plan (see article entitled: Land Management in the Kootenai National Forest), we formally expressed our opposition to the Forest Service. Our concerns centered on the further constriction of the narrow travel corridor in the southern portion of the Cabinet Mountains used by grizzly bears should the trail become motorized. We recently received notice that the Forest Service is reviewing the objections filed on the plan, and may hold public meetings in the future to try to resolve some of the issues raised through the formal objection process.

The trail to Rock Lake is a special place as it follows along the East Fork of Rock Creek. Those seeking quiet recreation do not want to share the trail with dirt bikes and ATVs, or, worse yet, mining equipment.



*Marcus Intinarelli (fourth from right) led backpackers on the trail to Engle Lake.*

## Alliance Activities Attract Many Supporters

The Alliance offered several activities for local members and supporters in 2013. These included our highly successful annual party and silent auction at Pend d' Oreille Winery, the Six Foot Swing Concert at the Old Granary, and a fun evening of beer tasting and raffle giveaways at the Pour Authority. We are indebted to the many businesses, musicians, supporters, and volunteers who made these events a success!

We also were excited to be able to offer a series of day hikes, along with overnight backpacking trips, in conjunction with Save Our Cabinets. These included trips to Rock Lake, St. Paul Lake, and Engle Lake in the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness.

Many thanks go to Marcus Intinarelli for helping to plan and lead the backpacking trips. These were well attended by Spokane area folks.

We are truly fortunate to have such a spectacular wilderness in our backyard! Getting out in this remarkable country reminds



*Participants in one of last summer's guided hikes, enjoyed a perfect day on the shore of St. Paul Lake in the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness.*

us of just what is at stake if proposed mining in the Cabinet Mountains of Montana moves forward.

We hope to again offer hikes and educational outings in 2014, so please stay tuned for more information.



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## PROTECTING OUR WATER AND QUALITY OF LIFE



*Rock Creek Alliance is a non-profit organization formed by citizens, conservationists, and outdoor sports enthusiasts to protect our public lands and water resources from proposed mining activities within the lower Clark Fork River—Lake Pend Oreille Watershed*

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