

Rosemont Copper Project: A Proposed Mining Operation
Jim Upchurch, Forest Supervisor
Coronado National Forest, Nogales Ranger District

Aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection:

- Destruction of a popular recreational area
- Loss of tourism
- Effects of toxic wastes on groundwater; toxic spills
- Depletion of Arizona's allotment of CAP water
- Pollution: air, light, noise
- Negative impact on wildlife
- Destruction of sites sacred to Native Americans

Connection between prior specific written comments and the content of the objection:

While I addressed all of these issues in my previous letter, I made stronger and more specific statements regarding water issues, especially those related to pollution, based on the number of toxic spills this country has experienced since my prior comments. I also addressed here in more detail the many promises that have been made by Augusta with no evidence to support them.

Dear Supervisor Upchurch:

I have already stated my objections to the Rosemont Mine in my previous letter, sent some time ago. What has transpired since has done nothing to alleviate my doubts and fears—in fact, my objections have only increased during the past couple of years despite the concessions that Rosemont has made to lessen some of the damage they would create. The ongoing destruction of our natural environment cannot be allowed to continue if any quality of life is going to be left for future generations. I cannot believe that the U. S. Forest Service, the agency that one would assume would be the first to protect one of the Arizona's most beautiful scenic areas, is now giving the okay to the sacrificing of thousands and thousands of trees, permanently changing the ecosystem in that area from an oasis to a wasteland. Trees are of vital importance to a desert area, and we can expect even higher summer temperatures and less rain without those trees.

The impact on tourism if this mine is allowed to proceed will be immense. The Santa Ritas are one of the most popular recreation spots in Southern Arizona, a virtual mecca for hikers, birders, and those who just enjoy being in the mountains. Who

wants to get anywhere near a noisy, polluting operation that is eating up the very territory now used for recreation—not to mention the fact that a scenic highway will be forever ruined with the constant traffic of trucks and blowing dust. I am involved in a highway cleanup project in the area, and I'm always surprised by the number of people I've run into in India have questioned me about our sign; all of them saw it while driving that scenic highway as visitors. You can bet that nobody is going to want to drive that highway if the mine is allowed to proceed. Air pollution will be a horrible problem for everyone living anywhere near the mine as well as hikers—if anyone will even to attempt hiking in the Santa Ritas. There is no controlling the wind, and that area is extremely windy. The jobs provided by Augusta—their best argument in favor of the mine, would be dangerous and temporary, and the economic benefit to southern Arizona would no doubt be offset by the lack of tourism—generally a very clean business—that would result due to the mine. And another negative besides the loss of tourism is the inevitable drop in property values for all those living anywhere near the mine.

Augusta has made all sorts of promises, but they have no track record of keeping such promises. They are an inexperienced and iffy operation at best. Given the tactics Augusta has used to try to sell Southern Arizonans on their mine—like bribing people with steak dinners and bringing them to forums where they are expected to speak in favor of the mine in return for those dinners—I have no reason whatsoever to trust them to fulfill any of their promises. Any company that would send out phony letters to people with supposed endorsements of the mine from their “neighbors,” citing only first names, is hardly to be trusted. And even if Augusta is taken over by a larger corporation, who is to say they would do any better? Mining operations do not have the best of reputations; conditions are dangerous, and when mistakes occur, the companies get off with minimal fines despite the fact that the destruction they have done is irreparable.

For me, water is the biggest issue, our most precious and necessary commodity—especially in a desert where it is becoming increasingly scarce. The Central Arizona Project water, which is no longer plentiful, should not be hogged by industry in a rapidly growing area that will need that water in the near future. Mining requires huge quantities of water. Pumping of groundwater would negatively affect Sahuarita and other nearby communities as well as drying up what few springs and creeks are still running. As these natural sources of water disappear, so will the wildlife that depends on them. Look at the drought in California. We have heard it said that the next generations of wars will be fought over water, and that's a frightening thought. We **MUST** start thinking about the negative effects this mine would have on the availability of water in this area and the future consequences of depleting an already dwindling commodity.

It isn't just quantity that is important; quality of the water is just as vital. One has only to look at what just happened in West Virginia—and even more recently in North Carolina—to understand why this mine is a bad idea for anyone living anywhere near the project. The company responsible for the mess in West Virginia

didn't even bother to show up for a Congressional hearing. And the Governor of North Carolina has already dealt with two previous spills of coal ash by imposing small fines and looking the other way. As the disasters pile up, so do my objections to allowing the Rosemont mine to proceed. When a disaster happens here—and it probably will—the company will be given a slap on the wrist and a tiny fine, the usual punishment for hideous environmental damage. But even if there is no major disaster, the toxic waste from this mine will inevitably affect the water that farmers and ranchers in the area depend on for their crops and herds. Filtering contaminated water through mine tailings will not purify it. The groundwater will be contaminated by whatever chemicals are being used in the process, and wells will become unusable. People in nearby towns will end up unable to drink what comes out of the tap. Pennsylvania offers numerous examples of how fracking has affected their tap water. I know Augusta has promised to recharge the water they use, but what good is contaminated water to anyone? The ACEQ would need to run specific tests or cite evidence from reliable resources to insure that any recharged groundwater met standards that indicate it would be safe for drinking or bathing.

There are other serious issues, for one the fact that parts of the proposed mine include a number of sites sacred to Native Americans—some of them burial grounds. None of the solutions Augusta has proposed—excavate the sites, bury human remains—are likely to happen in any way satisfactory to the Tohono O'odham nation. And when a site is bulldozed, what then? An apology? A small fine? Once a sacred site has been desecrated, there is no going back. No Native American tribes are in favor of this mine, as it would forever destroy what is sacred to them. And what of the impact on wildlife? We know a jaguar is living in the area of the proposed mine. Endangered plant species, migratory birds, and one species of bat would be negatively impacted by a huge mine. And there's the question of light pollution from a twenty-four hour a day operation—affecting the nearby observatories. Not to mention the inevitable noise pollution and the danger posed to anyone who has to use the highway to get to and from their homes.

I also wonder what will happen if the price of copper should fall drastically, as it has done in the past. Or what if the company cannot meet their financial obligations at some point in the process? Will they simply fold up operations, cut their losses, and leave? And where would that leave us in terms of those highly publicized jobs? Are we going to trust a foreign company that has no experience to speak of to fulfill all the promises they've made?

Finally, when the Augusta Company (or any company that buys them out) has completed the absolute destruction of what is for the moment a prized jewel in Pima County, they will leave us with a mess that will last forever. On the one hand we have heard a promise that they will reclaim the land, but on the other is an admission from mine officials in the DEIS: "The tailings and waste rock piles may be unstable over time, and reclamation may not adequately result in a stable, revegetated landscape. The...tailings and waste rock piles may not support native vegetation." That, at least, is a pretty honest admission. Anyone who has ever seen

an abandoned mine—from the lime green toxic lake left above Telluride, Colorado to the blasted hills with a few spindly, dying trees sticking up here and there west of I-10 outside Green Valley—knows what to expect from the Rosemont Mine wasteland. Mine tailings do not provide conditions necessary to supporting native vegetation.

Are the residents of Pima County willing to sacrifice one of the most beautiful areas in Southern Arizona for 400 or so jobs in a necessarily filthy industry that will leave the landscape forever scarred? Do we want to take the hit on tourism and, more importantly, the environment that will result? Those of us who are able to see beyond the immediate creation of jobs to the uncertainty of the fluctuating price of copper to all the other problems this mine would create do not want this mine. Public lands should be protected for public use—not for commercial use. Outdated (nineteenth century) mining laws are creating horrible problems today, and that issue needs to be addressed. But we do have environmental laws pertaining to water, air, habitat and land that may yet protect us. We must not allow this mine destroy the beauty of a huge scenic area on the basis of a bunch of promises that are likely to remain unfulfilled.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

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