

RED DEVIL MINE: A Threat to Our Health and Traditions



What is Red Devil?

Red Devil is an abandoned cinnabar and mercury mine site at the mouth of Red Devil Creek on the Kuskokwim River. From 1933 to 1971, mining operations included extensive underground and surface mining, on-site processing and waste disposal. The Bureau of Land Management assumed control of the site in 1987.



Legacy of Contamination

Piles of mine tailings, leaking underground fuel tanks, and processing chemicals were left on site. These hazardous materials have been leaking mercury, arsenic and other toxins into the groundwater and surrounding river system for more than four decades.



Unprecedented Fish Consumption Warning

For the first time in the history of fish and wildlife management in Alaska, officials issued guidelines restricting the consumption of fish in the middle Kuskokwim River area. Tests show dangerously elevated levels of mercury in pike, lush, Dolly Varden, Arctic grayling and other subsistence fish, as well as in the snails, larvae and small fish they eat.



Mercury can cause brain damage in infants and young children. That means women who are or can become pregnant, mothers who are nursing babies, and children 12 and under are at risk. Depending on the type and size of the fish, women and children are limited to 12 to 16 portions of fresh fish and one to four portions of dried fish per month.



The Math

Three meals a day for 30 days is 90 meals. If women of childbearing age and children eat pike or lush for only 16 meals, that leaves 74 meals to account for. In the winter, when dried fish provides the staple of the traditional diet, they are effectively cut off from the region's primary food source.



Who is Responsible for Cleanup?

THE SHORT ANSWER: BLM. As manager of the mine site, BLM is obligated under CERCLA to conduct a remedial investigation and feasibility study and address clean up alternatives. BLM has been conducting this investigation since 2009 but has yet to issue reports or recommendations.

The Kuskokwim Corporation and the State of Alaska have repeatedly requested the Red Devil Mine site be placed on the EPA's NPL for comprehensive evaluation and cleanup, with appropriate public input, Congressional oversight and funding. It has been over two years and the BLM and EPA have yet to reach an agreement. Meanwhile, mercury at Red Devil continues to leach into our waters.



ANCSA Land Conveyance

The Kuskokwim Corporation and Calista Corporation have selected the lands on and around the Red Devil Mine site for conveyance pursuant to ANCSA. Thanks to past congressional action, the Department of the Interior was required to provide information on contaminated lands that were conveyed to ANCs as part of the ANCSA land settlement. Its report estimated 650 contaminated sites on such lands.

As the future holder of the surface estate, we have a vested interest in the status of the investigation and mitigation of contamination on this site. Federal and state law subjects ANCs to liability for these lands once conveyed. The State of Alaska has required several ANCs to clean up similar sites, at considerable expense, even though contamination occurred prior to the land conveyance. We will not accept the Red Devil Mine site and surrounding lands in their current toxic state.

Congressional Action Is Needed

SHORT TERM: TKC requests the assistance of Alaska's congressional delegation to place the Red Devil Mine site on the NPL.

LONG TERM: TKC stands by Resolution 12-42, passed at the 2012 Alaska Federation of Natives Convention, supporting the introduction and enactment of federal legislation to acknowledge the financial responsibility of the federal government to remediate contaminated lands conveyed pursuant to ANCSA.





The Kuskokwim Corporation (TKC) was formed in 1977 when 10 ANCSA (Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act) village corporations located along the middle region of the Kuskokwim River merged. The villages include Lower Kalskag, Upper Kalskag, Aniak, Chuathbaluk, Napaimute, Crooked Creek, Red Devil, Georgetown, Sleetmute and Stony River.



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