



# Montana Environmental Information Center

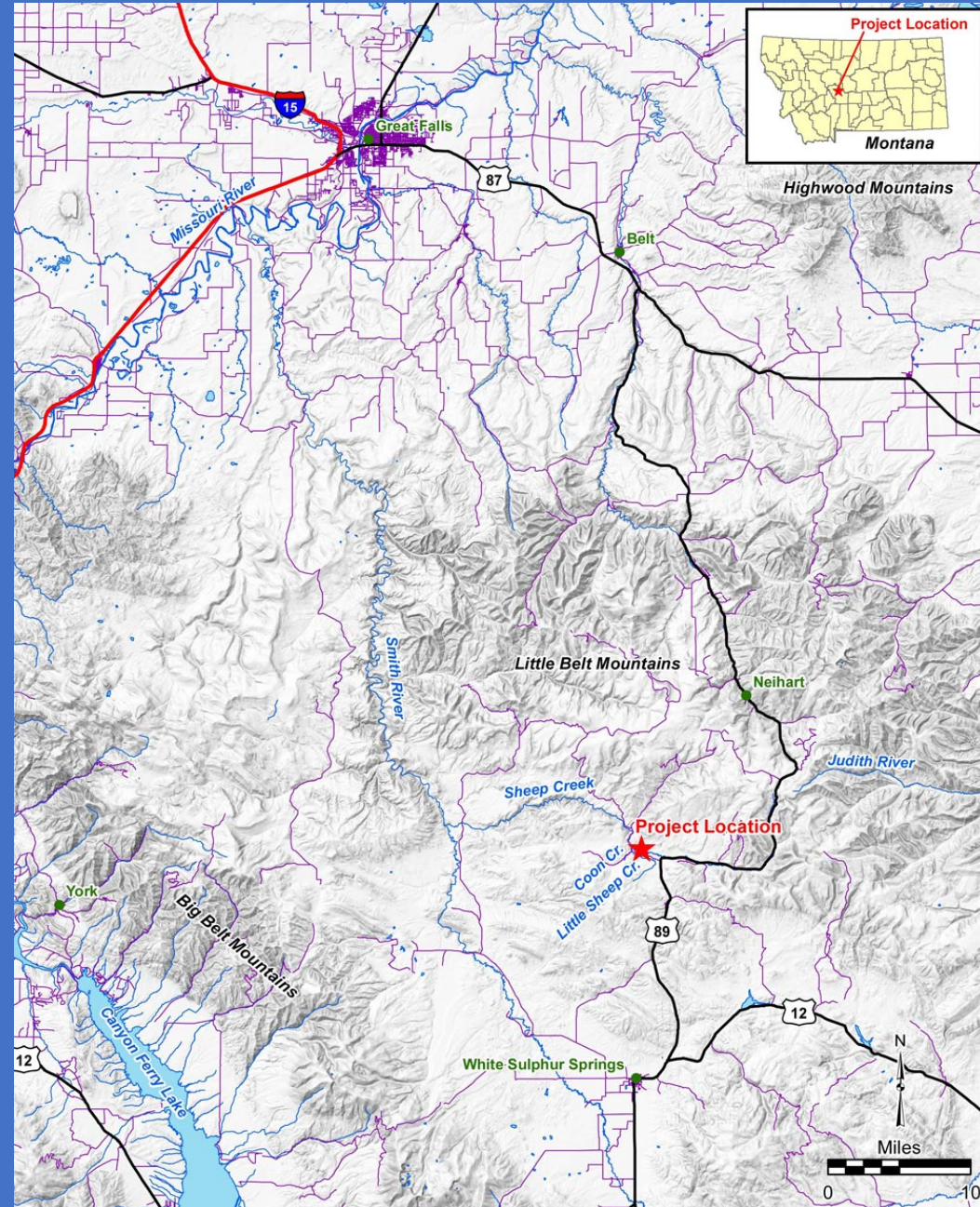


## The Quarantine Series The Smith River Mine

What's happened, and what's next, in the  
fight to protect the Smith?



# Location of Proposed Smith River Mine











## Smith River: An Economic Engine


- Approximately \$11 million in angler spending being pumped into the South Central Montana economy.
- \$3.2 million in salaries, wages, and income.
- Close to \$1 million in state and local tax revenue








# The Threat: Mining at Sheep Creek

 The Bozeman Daily Chronicle

## Smith River mine gets closer to approval; groups promise challenge

Montana environmental officials moved closer to approving a controversial copper mine in the Smith River drainage Friday, releasing a final ...  
1 month ago



 Billings Gazette

## Guest opinion: Copper mine plan threatens Smith River

These visitors paid \$180 million in taxes, which means a reduction in an individual Montana taxpayer of \$430 each year, according to the ...  
Nov 2, 2019




 Helena Independent Record

## Comments on copper mine project near Smith River initially flagged as spam

BOZEMAN — Officials say thousands of public comments submitted by email on a proposed copper mine in Montana were initially flagged as ...  
Jul 16, 2019



 Montana Standard

## GUEST VIEW Montana Conservation Elders oppose proposed mine near Smith River

... Montana Conservation Elders oppose proposed mine near Smith River ...  
I quote: "The group incurred a loss of \$14,194,685 during the year ...  
Dec 3, 2019



 U.S. News & World Report

## Montana Environmental Officials Approve Disputed Copper ...

Montana environmental officials approve disputed copper mine near tributary of popular Smith River. By Associated Press, Wire Service Content ...  
6 days ago

 Helena Independent Record

## Tintina touts potential for 50-year mining district

"Because the Smith is one of Montana's most beloved rivers, the Black Butte mine proposal requires world-class scientific scrutiny," Bruce Farling,  
...

Feb 28, 2016



 The Bozeman Daily Chronicle

## Split crowd at Black Butte copper meeting in Livingston

Chance of snow 50%. ... The underground copper mine proposed by Tintina Montana, ... of its connection to the Smith River, even though the mine would be about 19 ... kept close watch on the project over the years, and  
Apr 30, 2019



 Helena Independent Record

## Proposed copper mine won't harm Smith River tributary, officials say

Officials said Monday that a copper mine proposed along a tributary of one of Montana's most popular recreational rivers would cause the river no harm, ... million metric tons) of copper-laden rock and waste over 15 years  
Mar 11, 2019





## Permitting Timeline: Smith River Mine



- 2010 – Tintina applied for an exploration permit
- 2012 – Tintina applies for amendment to exploration permit,
- 2014 - MEIC takes them to court
- 2014 – Tintina Withdraws application for amendment, promises to apply for operating permit
- December 2015 Tintina applies for operating permit, there are several rounds back and forth
- Majority share of project is purchased by Sandfire, name changes
- August 2017 – DEQ deems application complete
- September 2017 DEQ begins draft EIS
- March 2019 – Draft EIS released by DEQ
- March 2020 – Final EIS released by DEQ
- April 2020 – Record of Decision (ROD) released by DEQ





# Two Major Permitting Tracks

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is the agency primarily responsible for permitting the Smith River Mine under two major laws.

A photograph of a gravel pit with two parallel gravel tracks running through it, leading towards a line of trees in the distance.

**Montana Metal Mine Reclamation Act (MMRA)**

**Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA)**





## Other Relevant Permits Required / Issued

- Clean Water Act Section 404 Permit, Issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Air Quality Permit, Issued by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality and required under the Clean Air Act of Montana
- Montana Pollution Discharge Elimination System (MPDES) Permit, Issued by the Montana DEQ and required under the Montana Water Quality Act
- Water Right Issued by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)





# DEQ's Conclusion and Record of Decision

- DEQ Approved the Permit under the Agency Modified Alternative, which additionally requires backfilling of the underground mine workings
- Stream depletions resulting from groundwater drawdown during mine dewatering would be 10% of base flows. For Coon Creek, a reduction of approximately 70% is estimated.
- Goal to minimize the amount of precipitation that infiltrates the reclaimed cemented tailings facility and prevent objectionable post-mining ground water discharges from the cemented tailing facility.
- "No objectionable post-mining groundwater discharges are expected."









# Why DEQ is WRONG to Issue Permit!



- DEQ refused to consider the full breadth of impacts, including Sandfire's plans for a massive expansion of the mine.
- Failed to fully analyze full breadth of alternatives
- Failed to look at cumulative impacts, including massive mine expansion
- Did not adequately address major water quality concerns
- Did not adequately address impacts associated with drawdown of water flows.

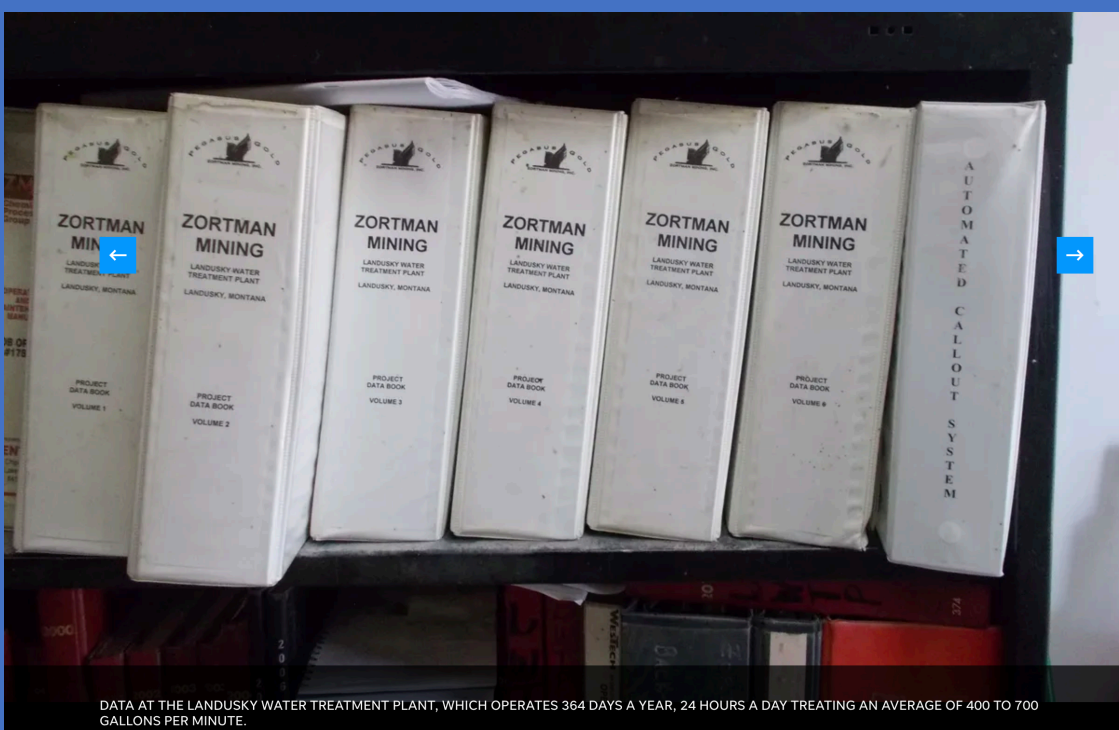




#### d. Cumulative impacts

There are two theories regarding the cumulative impact of two open pits to the groundwater system in the Little Rockies. One theory postulates that the groundwater regime between the two mines is separate, there is no contiguous groundwater body between the two areas. The second theory is that the two areas are probably connected by a fractured and complex geologic system which is reflected in the movement of groundwater and evidenced by the change in groundwater found in mine tunnels and adits over the years. This theory, probably the more likely of the two, proposes that there will be a cumulative effect on the groundwater due to infiltration from both pits. The impact, however, will be small due to the small area proposed for mining and no measurable cumulative impact is expected to surface water from either or both projects. The utilization of berms, ditches and impermeable barriers is expected to prevent deterioration of surface water from the waste ponds.





DATA AT THE LANDUSKY WATER TREATMENT PLANT, WHICH OPERATES 364 DAYS A YEAR, 24 HOURS A DAY TREATING AN AVERAGE OF 400 TO 700 GALLONS PER MINUTE.



## Zortman-Landusky gold mines cleanup funding



**\$46,518,735**

Pegasus Gold Corporation's reclamation and water bonds



**\$32,348,510**

State of Montana funding to date



**\$17,139,312**

Bureau of Land Management funding to date



**\$340,000**

Environmental Protection Agency funding to date

Source: Montana Department of Environmental Quality

From Great Falls Tribune and Mountain West News





# Mine Pollution Claims are ALWAYS Wrong

- Based on a review of government documents, water quality predictions made during mine permitting were wrong at 11 out of 12 mines (91.7% of mines).

## Smith River Mine

"No objectionable post-mining groundwater discharges are expected."

**Vs.**

## Zortman-Landusky Mine

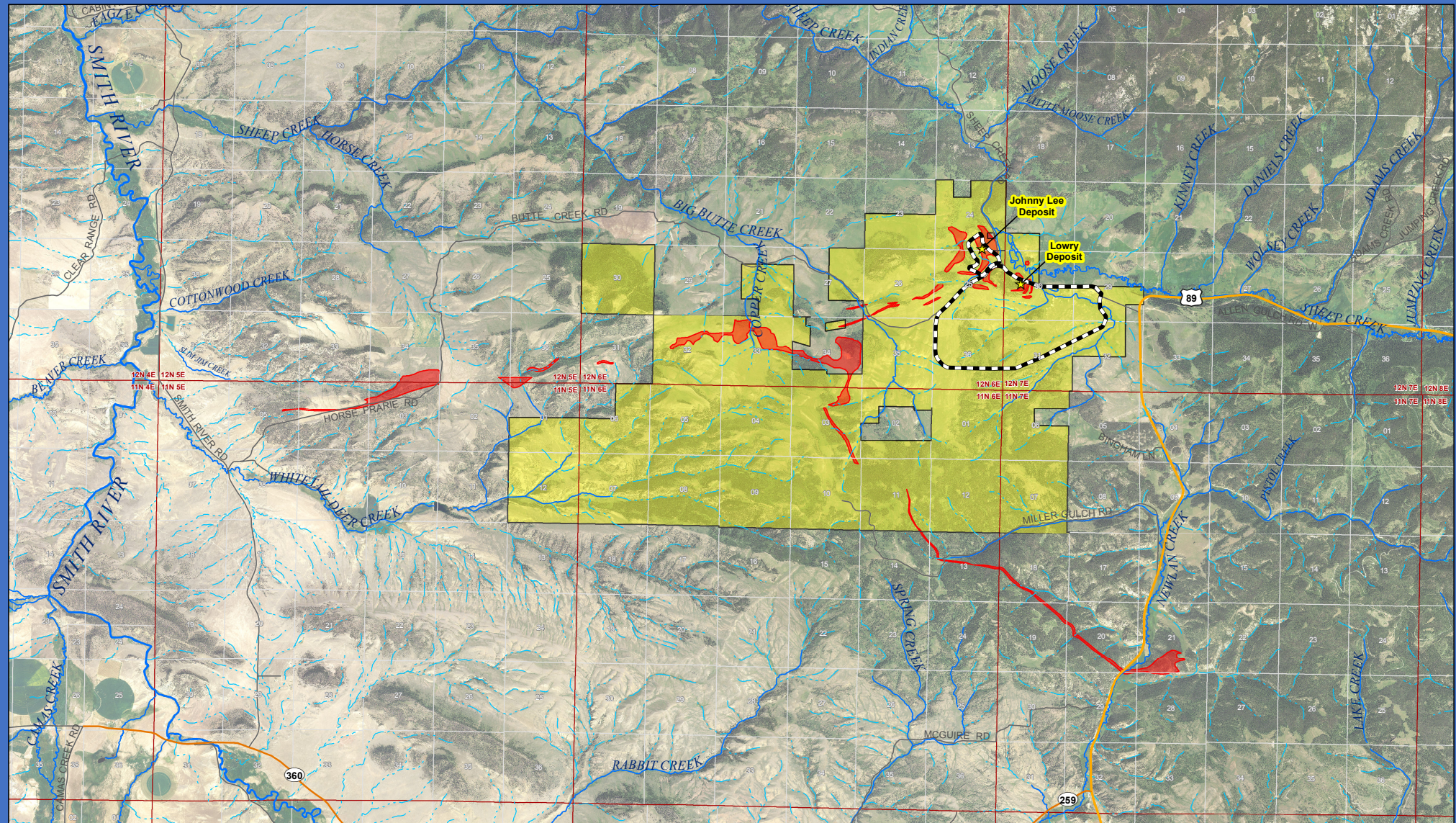
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Sandfire is interested in a major expansion and has acquired an interest in several thousand more acres of mineral rights on both public and private land. The Australian corporation is selling an “upside” of a “50-year mining district” to potential investors.

## Proposed Smith River Mine



Weathered Sulphide Zone  
Exposures Identified by  
Tintina (Approximate)



Minerals Rights and/or Surface Rights  
Leased or Owned by Tintina (Approximate)



Proposed Mine Permit  
Boundary (Approximate)

0 1 2  
Miles

1:80,000

Aerial Imagery: 2013 NAIP, USDA











## What's Next?

- The coalition fighting to protect the Smith River is strong. Organizations including MEIC, Trout Unlimited, Montana Trout Unlimited, American Rivers are currently evaluating the decision documents.
- Based upon our preliminary evaluation, we are very concerned that the DEQ has made a poor, and legally vulnerable decision. We have 60 days to appeal the decision.
- Bonding documents will be completed in next few weeks.





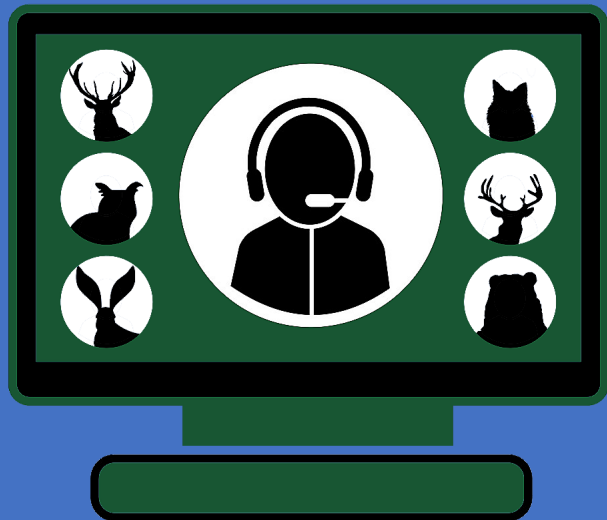


# Questions & Answers

Using the “Chat” Function, please  
type in your question

For More Information or to join MEIC go to: [www.meic.org](http://www.meic.org)

For More Information on the Smith, go to [www.saveoursmith.org](http://www.saveoursmith.org)



Join us on Thursday, April  
22nd, at 4 pm for:  
An Earth Day Special on MEIC