

Idaho Families for Clean Water

Dedicated to protecting Idaho's clean water for our families and for the future

MEDIA RELEASE

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Gold Mine Threatens Boise River

Announced changes at a planned open pit gold mine near Atlanta, will not protect the Boise River from contamination, a coalition of conservation organizations claimed Monday. Despite a change in the mining process, “The operation of a major open-pit and underground gold and silver mine in the headwaters of the Boise River threatens Boise’s water supply and one of its recreational gems,” explained spokesperson Liz Paul of Idaho Rivers United.

Toronto based Atlanta Gold Inc. announced on January 18, 2008 that it has “changed the strategic focus” of its proposed gold mining operations near the source of the Boise River sixty miles northeast of Boise. Atlanta Gold will now pursue a combined open-pit and underground operation with an on-site milling facility according to the release.

Atlanta Gold has been unsuccessful in obtaining permits from the U.S. Forest Service or Idaho agencies, or in getting financing for mine operations. With the proposed changes Atlanta Gold appears to be conceding that a cyanide heap leach mine would not be approved in the headwaters of the Boise River which provides drinking water and recreation opportunities for Idaho’s largest city. According to Idaho Families for Clean Water, the changes do nothing to alleviate concerns about contamination of the River. “This is at least the third major change in the operations plan for Atlanta Gold, and none of those plans has addressed the fundamental problem that major mining operations in the headwaters of the Boise puts the River and the entire Treasure Valley at risk,” according to John Robison of Idaho Conservation League.

During previous public comment periods on the proposed mining plans, Boise and Atlanta residents expressed concerns about a transportation plan which called for thousands of truckloads per year carrying diesel fuel, explosives, and dangerous chemicals along the network of dirt roads leading to remote Atlanta. “A mine of that size in Atlanta puts hundreds of miles of streams and rivers at risk of a diesel or chemical spill,” claimed James Piotrowski of the Boise Chapter of Trout Unlimited. “There is simply no way to safely deliver the necessary supplies for

an operation of this size over rough dirt roads along the banks of rivers and streams,” Piotrowski explained.

Atlanta Gold already has significant environmental concerns at its Atlanta site. Mine shafts from historic mining excrete brackish water laced with arsenic, and are expected to do so forever. The mine site is crossed or bordered by multiple streams which feed the Middle Fork of the Boise and its critical habitat for threatened bull trout. Atlanta Gold still faces problems with the adequacy of its mine waste treatment program.

The Atlanta Gold project is one of a number of new mines proposed in the headwaters of the Boise River, a watershed that supplies irrigation water for the Treasure Valley and approximately 20% of Boise’s municipal water supply. In addition to harboring threatened bull trout, the headwaters of the Boise River provide one of Idaho’s busiest and most successful big game hunting units, as well as year-round recreation for off-road vehicle enthusiasts, snowmobilers, cross-country skiers, hikers and anglers. The area also has a long history of mining and a backlog of environmental remediation needs. In recent years, local conservationists and environmentalists have attempted to address that backlog. “Abandoned mine sites across the west are damaging watersheds, fisheries and even municipal water supplies,” explained Pam Smolczynski of Trout Unlimited. “Restoring these areas so that we have healthy communities needs to be a priority,” she said.

Trout Unlimited’s Piotrowski explained the impact of potential mine operations: “Idaho’s fastest growing communities rely on the entire Boise River watershed. It’s where we get clean drinking water, where we hike, hunt, fish and take our families on summer weekends. There are some places that just shouldn’t be mined.”

Idaho Families for Clean Water is a coalition of organizations and individuals working to protect the headwaters of the Boise River.

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