

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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For immediate release

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Forest Service requires Atlanta Gold to pay for arsenic treatment

BOISE — Clean water conservationists today applauded the Forest Service for requiring an \$8.6 million bond from the Canadian mining company that wants to mine gold in the Boise River watershed near Atlanta.

The Forest Service is requiring the Atlanta Gold Co. to post an \$8.6 million bond to treat existing pollution before allowing fully fledged mining operations. A portion of that — \$1.3 million — is due before the company can start any exploration. The remaining \$7.3 million would be due before mining operations begin in three to five years. The Forest Service only has a \$35,000 bond in place at the present time.

The site already suffers arsenic pollution from past mining. A permanent water treatment facility is needed to prevent arsenic from flowing into Montezuma Creek and the Middle Fork of the Boise River.

“We are cautiously optimistic,” said John Robison, of the Idaho Conservation League. “In the past, taxpayers have been burned when mining companies have bolted, leaving the public to clean up the mess. It appears the Forest Service is taking this risk seriously.”

This week the Boise National Forest sent a letter to Atlanta Gold spelling out the bonding requirements before allowing the mining company to continue to explore for gold.

Atlanta Gold needs to conduct additional drilling before constructing a combined open-pit, underground mine. Atlanta Gold last explored this mine shaft in 1994 and 1998 but their settling pond was unable to prevent arsenic from reaching the creek. Atlanta Gold has since been forced to operate a temporary treatment facility to reduce the arsenic levels before the water enters the Boise River.

The Forest Service requires mining companies to post bonds for reclamation and water treatment work in the event companies go bankrupt or are unable to properly clean up a site.

“The Forest Service clearly listened to downstream communities concerned about protecting clean water,” said Jessica Ruehrwein with the Sierra Club. “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.”

The Forest Service is to be commended for taking action to protect the Boise River, but Idaho Families for Clean Water does not agree with the Forest Service strategy of allowing Atlanta Gold to use an "installment plan" based on future fundraising to post the bond.

“We already know that the water will have to be treated indefinitely, so the Forest Service should require the full bond now,” said Liz Paul of Idaho Rivers United. “Bonding for known problems should not be linked to future profits and potentially more water pollution.”

While Atlanta Gold has put their larger, open pit cyanide heap leach mine on hold for now, they recently announced they had received \$5.6 million in investments and quadrupled their mining claims by staking over 10 square miles of claims near the historic town of Rocky Bar.

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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