

Abandoned Siskiyou mine among nation's most hazardous

Skye Kinkade, Mount Shasta Area Newspapers, 9-17-11

An abandoned mine in Siskiyou County near the Oregon border was added to the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund National Priorities List yesterday, making it eligible for federal clean-up funds.

The Blue Ledge Mine is the county's first Superfund site, which designates it as one of the most complex, uncontrolled or abandoned hazardous waste sites in the country, according to an EPA press release.

Toxic pollutants discharged by the mine sully streams in the Rogue River and Siskiyou National Forest.

Located on privately owned land approximately three miles south of the Oregon border, the Blue Ledge was the site of past copper and zinc mining operations. Copper, cadmium and acid mine drainage have contaminated sediments and surface water at levels that are toxic to aquatic organisms, the release states.

This pollution has caused the absence of fish for more than three miles downstream, the release continues. Potential negative impacts may be seen in fisheries all the way to the Applegate Reservoir, a popular recreational area.

In 2006 the EPA performed an emergency response action to stabilize waste rock that was releasing into Joe Creek, just downstream from the mine. In 2010, the Forest Service received \$12.4 million in American Reinvestment and Recovery Act funds plus \$1.4 million from the ASARCO Environmental Trust to place the waste rock into an on-site repository. This work began last summer. Superfund listing of the site will allow completion of the cleanup, according to the release.

"The legacy of abandoned mines continues to threaten the public health and natural resources of California," said Jared Blumenfeld, EPA's Regional Administrator for the Pacific Southwest. "Now that these toxic mines sites have been declared Superfund sites, the EPA can move ahead to clean them up, protecting important waterways... from mercury and other pollutants."

To date, there have been 1,652 sites listed on the national Superfund list since 1980, 107 of which are in California, according to the EPA. Nationally, cleanups have been completed at two-thirds of these sites.