

# **Nevada County Board of Supervisors delays action on appeal of North Star Mine water treatment project**

*Sends issue back to staff, engineers*

**Alan Riquelmy, Grass Valley Union News, 11-11-15**

Nevada County supervisors on Tuesday unanimously agreed to postpone a decision on an appeal of the North Star Mine water treatment plan, opting to send the proposal back to county staff and engineers to tweak its design.

The board's decision to re-examine earthen berms for retention ponds delays construction by Newmont Mining Co., which is mandated to treat mine water tainted with iron, manganese and arsenic that's draining into Wolf Creek. The project includes two ponds used in the treatment.

The earliest the project could return to the board is next month. Newmont would then have to obtain other permits after gaining the board's approval. Construction along Allison Ranch Road is expected to take six to nine months.

"What we were fighting for was relocation," said Leroy Bakelmun, who appealed the county Planning Department's September decision to allow the project. "Now it looks like they'll build a stronger, better version of what they proposed."

Bakelmun, who along with several other homeowners raised the \$1,374.20 appeal fee, began his presentation by extending a measuring tape 20 feet. It reached from the board's dais to just past the desk where the public speaks.

"That's how far this project would be from my property line," he said. "Double that and that's my front door."

Bakelmun said residents aren't opposed to the project. They do, however, object to its location.

"This just happens to be the cheapest and most convenient way for Newmont," Bakelmun argued, noting later, "We're just homeowners. We don't have the gigantic amount of money to fight this project."

Susan Hollenback, another homeowner near the project, said she's concerned about metals like iron, manganese and arsenic that would settle at the bottom of two treatment ponds.

"The valuation of my property, I can't imagine it's going to help at all," she added.

Jessica Hankins, senior planner with the county, addressed concerns given by opponents at both the September Planning Commission meeting and on Tuesday.

Many people who live near the proposed water treatment project questioned its location along Allison Ranch Road and suggested alternative solutions.

They also expressed worry about potential leaks from the treatment ponds and encouraged the county to complete an environmental impact report before proceeding.

According to Hankins, substantial evidence of an environmental impact must exist to require an EIR.

“Public controversy is not sufficient reason to do an EIR,” she added.

Additionally, Newmont must construct the project off Grass Valley property as part of a settlement. An active system would require chemicals, supervision, maintenance and electricity. The proposed passive system requires none of those, Hankins said.

“Again, it’s really about location,” Bakelmun said. “It’s all about location.”

In other matters the board:

— Unanimously approved a resolution in support of a Children’s Bill of Rights. Lindsey Dunckel, representative of the Community Support Network, said the bill of rights unites a community behind a common goal and keeps it focused on long-term planning.

— Accepted a \$263,750 grant for CalWORKs Housing Support program. The money will help about 40 Nevada County families with rent payments.

— Heard from Rem Scherzinger, general manager of the Nevada Irrigation District, about the proposed Centennial Reservoir project. The reservoir would be on the Bear River, between the Rollins and Combie reservoirs, and hold almost 36 billion gallons of water.

— Delayed action until Dec. 8 on rezoning land along East Bennett Road. The proposal is part of the state-mandated high-density residential rezoning that affects Nevada County.