



June 2000

## **EPA Fact Sheet**

### **Blackbird Mine Update: Cobalt, Idaho**

#### **Contamination Along Panther Creek Removed**

The Blackbird Mine Site Group (Site Group) removed about 14,250 cubic yards of contaminated soils from several areas along the banks of Panther Creek (overbank deposits) in the fall of 1999. The properties where removals took place were: the Bevan property, Deep Creek Campground and an area on Forest Service land described as the "rip rap bar" which is located between the Cobalt Townsite and Deep Creek. Clean backfill replaced the contaminated material, and the areas were seeded and/or planted with native vegetation.

#### **Tailings in Blackbird Creek Removed**

The Site Group also removed about 8,820 cubic yards of visible tailings along Blackbird Creek to reduce the risk of exposure and to help assure the tailings would not move to another area during a storm or the next snowmelt. After the visible tailings were removed, the areas were backfilled with clean material or had rip rap (rock cover) placed on top.

#### **Overall Site Investigations**

In 1999, the Site Group performed additional investigations in areas where potentially contaminated soils were deposited along Panther, Blackbird, Big Deer, South Fork of Big Deer, and Bucktail creeks, as well as other areas at the mine. The annual surface water quality was also monitored in these creeks. EPA will use the results of the investigations and monitoring to evaluate the potential risks to plants and animals in the area. The results will be available to the public when the final report, called a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study, (RI/FS), is completed in the fall of 2001.

#### **What is Planned for Spring/Summer/Fall 2000**

By winter 2000, all remaining contaminated soil along the banks of Panther Creek will be removed. The areas where removals will take place are: the Cobalt Townsite and Noranda pastures, the Sillings and Fernandez properties, and an area at the confluence of Napias Creek. Work will also be completed on the Bevan

property. The annual water quality monitoring in the creeks affected by the mine will be performed to measure the contaminant levels. Compared to past years, the levels of copper and cobalt have been going down.

The Site Group has given EPA a proposal to cap all or part of the Cobalt Townsite and Noranda pastures. EPA is in the process of making a decision on this proposal, and the community will be notified.

#### **What's Next?**

In 2001, areas not addressed through cleanup actions to date that still may pose a risk to human health and the environment will be evaluated. These areas include the Westfork Tailings Dam, sediments remaining around the site, and the springs below the 7,000 Dam. Other areas identified in the RI/FS process will also be evaluated. EPA will determine whether additional cleanup actions are needed, and if so, these actions will be the final actions for the site.

The final proposed cleanup remedy for Blackbird Mine will be issued in the fall of 2001. There will be a public meeting and a formal comment period, and you will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed plan during that time. The final cleanup decision will be made in early 2002 following the public comment period.

## Background

Blackbird Mine is an inactive mine approximately 20 miles west of Salmon, Idaho in the Salmon National Forest in east central Idaho, Lemhi County. Cobalt, gold, silver, and copper ore were extracted from underground and open pit mining operations. The mining operations left an open pit (Blacktail Pit), several miles of underground workings, waste rock piles and a tailings disposal impoundment.

Contaminated soil, sediments and tailings were released from the Blackbird Mine site during high water flows from thunderstorms and snowmelt. The environmental concerns are the releases of cobalt, copper and iron, as well as arsenic into Meadow, Blackbird, Big Deer and Panther Creeks. Investigations show the contaminated material was deposited along Panther Creek in the overbank soil as well as in pastures as a result of flood irrigation. The highest concentrations of arsenic were found from the Cobalt Townsite down to Napias Creek. Arsenic concentrations generally decreased downstream of Napias Creek to the Salmon River.

In May of 1993, EPA proposed the site to be placed on its National Priorities List (NPL) for further investigation and possible cleanup under Superfund authority. EPA reached agreement with Potentially Responsible Parties (PRPs) to investigate the contamination and evaluate the cleanup options for the major source areas at the mine. This investigation is known as a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study. In 1998, the PRPs performed cleanup actions at the Panther Creek Inn. The PRPs, referred to as the Blackbird Mine Site Group, are Noranda Mining Inc., M.A. Hanna Co. and Intalco

Corporation (formerly Alumet Corporation). The work by the PRPs is being performed under EPA oversight, and in consultation with the State of Idaho, U.S. Forest Service, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

## Are You Interested in Forming a Community Advisory Group?

Community Advisory Groups are one of the most effective ways communities can participate in cleanup decisions. The group is a committee, task force, or board made up of residents affected by a hazardous waste site. The Community Advisory Group enhances public participation in the cleanup process by providing a public forum where community representatives can discuss their diverse interests, needs, and concerns about the cleanup.

If you are interested in setting up a Community Advisory Group, please call **Jeanne O'Dell**, Community Involvement Coordinator, at **206-553-6919** or toll free at **1-800-424-4372, ext. 6919** by July 31st. A meeting can be arranged in the fall, if there is sufficient interest.

## For More Information

Copies of reports that support the removals and cleanups relating to the Blackbird Mine are available at the following locations:

Salmon Public Library  
204 Main Street  
Salmon, ID

Panther Creek Inn  
Cobalt, ID

U. S. EPA  
Idaho Operations Office  
1435 N. Orchard  
Boise, ID

U. S. EPA  
1200 Sixth Avenue  
7th Floor Records Center  
Seattle, WA

## Questions

If you have any questions, please contact:

**Fran Allans**, EPA Project Manager  
**208-378-5775**

**Jeanne O'Dell**, Community Involvement Coordinator  
**206-553-6919** or toll free at  
**1-800-424-4372**

*To ensure effective communication with everyone, additional services can be made available to persons with disabilities by contacting one of the numbers above.*



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Region 10 (ECO-081)  
1200 Sixth Avenue  
Seattle WA 98101

BULK RATE  
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*EPA FACT SHEET  
BLACKBIRD MINE  
Cobalt, Idaho*