Whatcom Creek Coal Mine
Preliminary Assessment Trip Report
Bellingham, Washington
TDD: 03-01-0002

Contract: 68-S0-01-01
September 2004

Region 10

START-2

Superfund Technical Assessment and Response Team

Submitted To: Joanne LaBaw, Task Monitor
United States Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98101

TRIP REPORT

DATE: September 16, 2004

TO: Joanne LaBaw, Task Monitor, EPA, Mail Stop ECL-115

FROM: Mark Longtine, Project Manager, E & E, Seattle, WA

SUBJ: Whatcom Creek Coal Mine Preliminary Assessment

REF: Contract No. 68-S0-01-01, Technical Direction Document No. 03-01-0002

Place Visited:

Site Name:	Whatcom Creek Coal Mine
CERCLIS ID No.:	WAN001002483
Location:	Whatcom County, Washington
Latitude:	48˚ 45' 13" North
Longitude:	122˚ 26' 7" West
Legal Description:	Section 28, Township 38 North, Range 3 East, Willamette Meridian
Congressional District:	Washington

Purpose of Trip:

Site reconnaissance visit for preliminary assessment.

Person Responding:

Mark Longtine, Ecology and Environment, Inc., Seattle, Washington.

Site Owner:

City of Bellingham
Finance Department/Asset Division
210 Lottie Street
P.O. Box V
Bellingham, Washington 98227-1581

Date of Trip:

January 29, 2004

BACKGROUND

A preliminary assessment (PA) was performed at the Whatcom Creek Coal Mine, located in Bellingham, Whatcom County, Washington. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is conducting PAs and pre-Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Information System (CERCLIS) screenings at several abandoned coal mines in the Bellingham/Lake Whatcom area, Washington. The purpose of the PAs and pre-CERCLIS screenings is to determine whether the mines pose a threat to public health or the environment, and to determine whether environmental cleanup is needed. The EPA is conducting the PAs and pre-CERCLIS screenings in response to a citizens' petition filed by two environmental groups in Bellingham, the Environmental Exposure Network and the Clean Water Alliance. These groups contend the mines may contain pollutants, such as mercury and heavy metals.

SITE DESCRIPTION/OWNERSHIP HISTORY

No information on a "Whatcom Creek Coal Mine" has been located anywhere in the Bellingham/Lake Whatcom area. The approximate location of the Whatcom Creek Coal Mine is illustrated in Figure 1. The most likely reason for this is that no coal mine of that name ever existed in the Bellingham/Lake Whatcom area. However, coal prospecting has been reported along Whatcom Creek by Olaf Jenkins, who prepared the *Geological Investigation of the Coal Fields of Western Whatcom County, Washington* (Jenkins 1923) for the State of Washington Department of Conservation and Development, Division of Geology. Jenkins (1923) reports the presence of an "old prospect hole, which was driven on an incline for some 20 or 30 feet" at a location "one-third of a mile below Whatcom Falls (SW¼, NE¼, NW¼, Sec. 28, T. 38 N., R. 3 E.) and crossing the creek which forms the outlet to Lake Whatcom." The coal seam at this location is described by Jenkins (1923) as irregular in thickness: "In places it measures 6 inches thick and in others as high as 16 inches, while it is said that in the old prospect hole… the seam widens to 3 feet." Jenkins (1923) stated that the "coal appears to be of good grade, and, it is said, was removed for local consumption."

No other information on a Whatcom Creek Coal Mine has been located during the PA.

Despite considerable effort, the physical location of the Whatcom Creek Coal Mine could not be determined (see the "START-2 ACTIONS" section below). Therefore, the ownership history of the Whatcom Creek Coal Mine could not be positively determined. However, based upon available information, it is likely that the prospecting activities described by Jenkins (1923) at Whatcom Creek

occurred on a 198.81-acre parcel (Whatcom County Parcel Number 380328 177195 0000) currently owned by the City of Bellingham (Whatcom County 2003).

SITE OPERATIONS AND WASTE CHARACTERISTICS

As stated above, available information regarding the Whatcom Creek Coal Mine is very limited. No information on the coal mining or prospecting operations is available. Based upon Jenkins' (1923) observations, it is likely that coal mining activities were restricted to prospecting or limited mining, and that the mining or prospecting ceased prior to 1922.

START-2 ACTIONS

To obtain information about coal mining in the Bellingham/Lake Whatcom area, including the area of the Whatcom Creek Coal Mine, START-2 reviewed numerous reports, maps, and other documents. In addition, START-2 conducted interviews with representatives of federal, state, and local agencies; representatives of academic institutions; and owners or representatives of properties in the vicinity of the former coal mining activities. A list of these data sources for the Bellingham/Lake Whatcom Coal Mines PA/pre-CERCLIS screening project is provided in Appendix A.

Little documentation or other information regarding the Whatcom Creek Coal Mine was obtained as a result of the data gathering efforts. All pertinent information gathered has been incorporated into this trip report, and was used to guide efforts to physically locate the Whatcom Creek Coal Mine during a site reconnaissance visit performed by START-2. START-2 visited the area of the Whatcom Creek Coal Mine on January 29, 2004, to attempt to locate features or evidence of historic mining activities. START-2 walked along both sides of Whatcom Creek in the suspected vicinity of the Whatcom Creek Coal Mine. No evidence of the former coal mining activities were observed during the site visit. No evidence of coal mining activities, sources, or evidence of contamination of any kind (e.g., stained soil, distressed vegetation) were observed.

CONCLUSIONS

Available historical information indicates that coal mining activities associated with the Whatcom Creek Coal Mine were restricted to limited mining or prospecting. No evidence of coal mining activities were noted during the January 29, 2004, site visit. No evidence of hazardous substance sources or contamination (e.g., discolored soil, distressed vegetation) were observed during the site visit.

Source: Maptech, Inc. 2001.

ecology and environment, inc.
International Specialists in the Environment
Seattle, Washington

0 .75 1.5
Approximate Scale in Miles

BELLINGHAM/LAKE WHATCOM COAL MINES
Whatcom County, Washington

Figure 1
SITE VICINITY MAP
WHATCOM CREEK COAL MINE

Date:	Drawn by:	
9/16/04	AES	10:START-2\03010002\fig 1

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APPENDIX A

PROJECT DATA SOURCES

PROJECT DATA SOURCES:

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PROJECT DATA SOURCES:

RESEARCH FACILITY CONTACTS

Bellingham Public Library
210 Central Avenue
Bellingham, Washington 98225
Margaret Ziegler, Reference Librarian

Center for Pacific Northwest Studies/Washington State Archives: Northwest Regional Branch
Goltz-Murray Archives Building
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