



# Klau / Buena Vista Mines Superfund Site

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Region 9

San Francisco, CA

San Luis Obispo County, California

April 2011

## Update on Site Activities

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been involved in three different investigations of the Klau/Buena Vista (KBV) Mines Superfund site. The results from these investigations will be documented in the Remedial Investigation (RI) report which will present the nature and extent of contamination at the site, what kinds of risks it may pose to humans and the environment and how contaminants may have moved off site. The RI report is expected to be available early this summer. This fact sheet will explain what we have been looking at and where we are going with each investigation and the overall project. The three areas we have examined are:

- KBV property itself—the source of the contamination
- Las Tablas Creek—where contamination from the mine was transported and deposited downstream
- Lake Nacimiento—where contamination from the mine was deposited

### Klau/Buena Vista Mines Property (Operable Unit 1)

Sampling of soil, groundwater, mineral salts, plants and animals on the mine property has been completed and we are in the process of interpreting the results. A key part of the RI report will be to evaluate the risk to the ecosystem by performing a baseline ecological risk assessment or BERA. This study is almost complete. It involved determining the amount of contamination taken up by plants and small mammals, such as deer mice, and how it could accumulate higher up the food chain into animals such as coyotes and hawks. The main risk to wildlife is from mercury and methyl mercury in soil and sediments. The few other metals present in elevated concentrations are mostly located in the same areas as the mercury and do not pose as significant a risk.

The process of how we might address the contamination on this part of the site is called a Feasibility Study or FS. The RI report, which analyzed the sampling, will be reviewed by other regulatory agencies and the public prior to developing the FS (by the end of this year) and a proposed plan for cleanup (early next year).

### Las Tablas Creek (Operable Unit 2)

We have completed our sampling of water, soil, sediment and aquatic life along 6.5 miles of Las Tablas Creek from the mine site to the Harcourt Reservoir. Sampling was conducted in both wet and dry seasons (April and September 2010) to assess the impact of seasonal changes on the transport of mercury and the formation of methyl mercury. The results of both sampling seasons are currently being interpreted, and a draft RI report is expected early this summer.

As with the mine property itself, the results will be reviewed by other regulatory agencies and the public prior to developing a Feasibility Study toward the end of the year. The FS will look at how we might clean up areas of the creek and will form the basis for our proposed plan for cleanup sometime next year.

## Lake Nacimiento (Operable Unit 3)

Contamination from the mine site was deposited in the lake, the probable cause of the current advisories against fish consumption due to mercury. EPA's investigation here could prove to be the most complex of all the investigations connected with the KBV site. Some of the challenges associated with this area include the size and depth of the lake; the multiple ways mercury and methyl mercury can move through it; and the possible cleanup approaches with widely varying effectiveness. Strong and sound technical expertise will be required to effectively address this area. To meet this challenge, EPA will set up a stakeholders group made up of local residents and state and county agencies to gather input, while also creating a technical review committee. This technical committee will be comprised of experts from the U.S. Geological Survey and academic institutions who have investigated similar lakes and contaminant issues and will review our approach. EPA is currently obtaining available technical information on Lake Nacimiento to develop a model of how mercury acts in the lake system and possible ways to sample and test that model. The model and approach will be available this summer in a technical memo followed by a more detailed work plan later this year.

## Slope Failure Affects Last Summer's Stabilization

Heavy winter rains have caused our efforts to stabilize the slope of capped tailings on the Buena Vista Mine to fail. Last summer's removal action was the second attempt to stabilize this slope following a 300-year-rain in October 2009. More than 40 inches of rain fell this past year, with a six-inch event in one weekend in March. This winter's slope failure was larger than the last, causing subsidence on the slope face, soil to flow into the existing sedimentation basin below and exposing mine tailings. Other repairs we made continue to work well (deepening the spillway at Klau Pond, adding fencing, replacing the gravel pack around a standpipe).

## Repair Slope or Move Tailings?

Since efforts to stabilize this slope have not been successful, we are evaluating whether it makes sense to try again or excavate the mine tailings and place them in an interim storage area elsewhere on the site. As stated above, addressing the situation in place has been problematic due to saturated soil. Even though we had excavated the exposed saturated materials and made the slope less steep, it still could not hold up to the amount of rain we had these past few months. We even tried to eliminate other sources of saturation such as replacing the mine caretaker's water tank which had been leaking. It is quite likely we would eventually move these tailings to a permanent location as part of the final site remedy, so this seems a reasonable option. We will keep the community informed as we work toward the best solution.

## Information Repositories

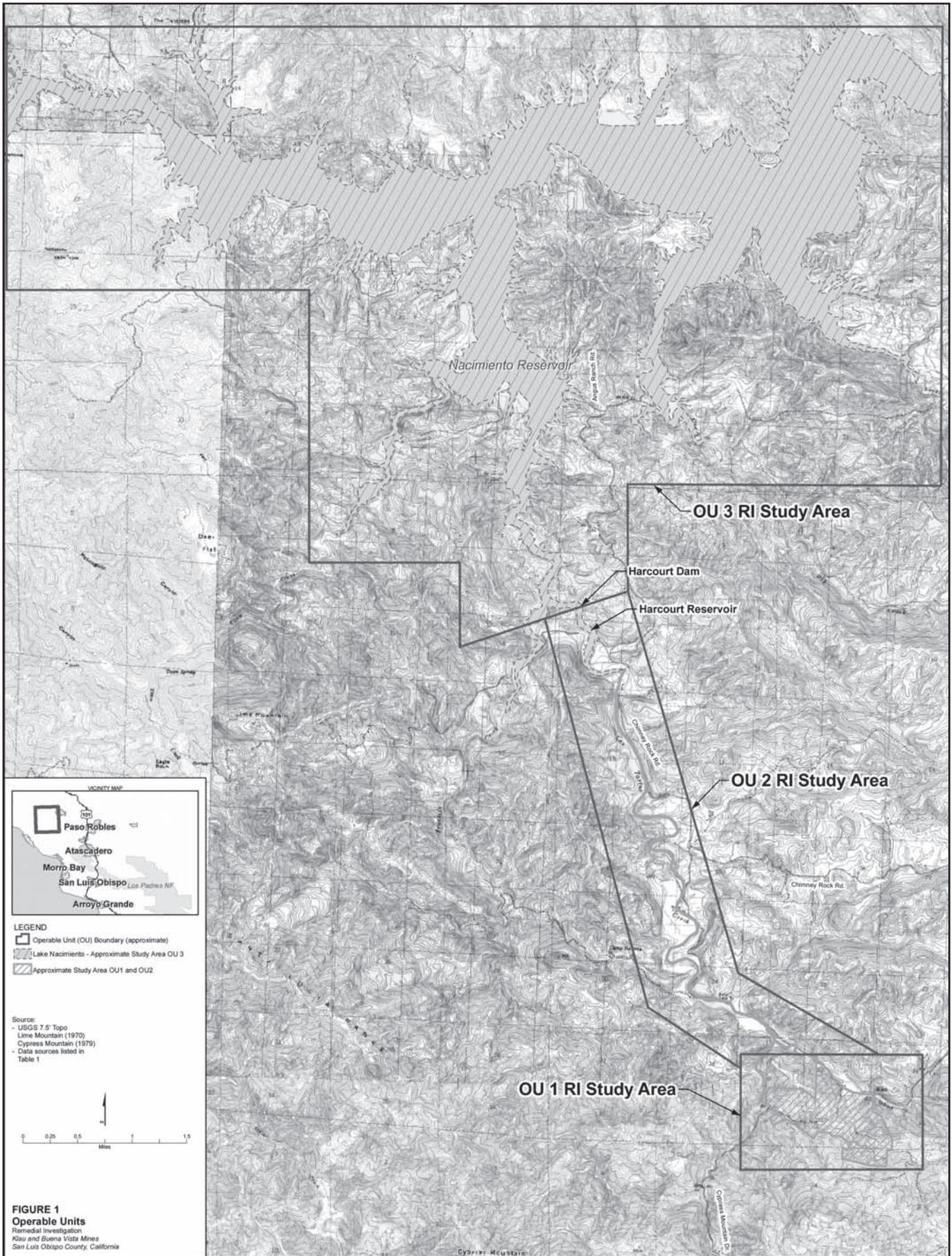
Documents related to the Klau/Buena Vista Mines site can be found at the following locations:

### **Paso Robles Public Library**

1000 Spring St.  
Paso Robles, CA 93445  
(805) 237-3870  
Mon – Fri 10 am to 8 pm  
Saturday 10 am to 5 pm

### **EPA Superfund Records Center**

95 Hawthorne St., Suite 403S  
San Francisco, CA 94105  
(415) 820-4700  
Mon – Fri 8 am to 5 pm





# Klau / Buena Vista Mines Superfund Site

## Update on Site Activities

### For More Information

If you have questions or concerns regarding the Klau/Buena Vista Mines site, please contact:

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Both Jim and Vicki can be reached toll-free at (800) 231-3075. This is a message line only...your call will be returned.



EPA website for KBV site:

<http://www.epa.gov/region09/klaubuenavista>



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