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crude oil:



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A-J mine info sparks investigation

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THE JUNEAU EMPIRE

Earl Hubbard would drink water straight from the Alaska-Juneau gold mine.

Hubbard was mad when he learned mine developer Echo Bay Alaska released contaminants into Gold Creek before 1994. But it didn't change the results of water tests taken since then that show the water is clean, said the Department of Environmental Conservation team leader for the A-J mine.

"I can't do a darn thing about what happened in 1994, even though it upsets me," Hubbard said, "but I can be darn sure of what's in Deep North and be sure I'm not going to poison my mom and dad."

Hubbard has at least another

month to be extra sure the water is pure before it is pumped into Gold Creek near the city's drinking water supply source.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency won't allow Kvaerner Environmental to pump out the series of mine tunnels and caverns called Deep North until the EPA has reviewed an appeal by Alaskans for Juneau, said EPA mining coordinator Bill Riley.

The appeal is based on documents from FBI and EPA criminal investigations of the mining company that found Echo Bay workers let mud, oil, grease, old sewage, ammonia and urine empty through tunnels into Gold Creek at night prior to 1994.

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"The reports that have come out that we've seen so far are very different than what the company's policy is and has been," said Echo Bay spokesman Bill Goodhard. "We are and have been good stewards of health and environment."

Echo Bay is comparing the new documents with a 1994 state investigation to see how much of the data is truly new, said David Stone, a former company spokesman who is again working for Echo Bay.

"Obviously the concerns that have been raised about nighttime activity that have been done for the company to create turbidity at night, that's serious and the company is looking very closely at those allegations," Stone said.

The mine closure review team held an emergency meeting Tuesday to respond to the federal investigators' documents. The consensus of the federal, state and city agencies and the mining and cleanup companies was to review the data before proceeding.

The EPA will hold off the pumping permit, Riley said. An EPA mine expert from Washington, D.C., will reinspect the mine and EPA is considering the environmental group Alaskans for Juneau's request for independent monitoring of the mine and other added requirements.

Water must be pumped out of the Deep North caverns before the mine is closed up again so it doesn't overflow in the future. The plan was to pump the water through a filtration and testing plant, then release it into Gold Creek below the city well field. Pumping was to start this week.

Deep North holds 400 million gallons, more than four times the capacity of Aurora Harbor, Hubbard said. Anything dumped into

the cavern has had ample time to dilute, evaporate and settle to the bottom, he said. He also said the water has been tested for 62 metals, hydrocarbons, nutrients and physical characteristics and met all requirements.

"We've tested everything from toe jam to radio-nuclides," said Hubbard, pulling out file drawers of water-quality data collected weekly from the mine.

The only substance mentioned in the new documents that hasn't been tested for is fecal coliform, a bacteria found in sewage. Hubbard said he is adding it to the list, though he doesn't expect to find any, since human waste in the mine is old and small in quantity.

The water in Deep North is clearer than what comes from most taps, Hubbard said. On a scale used to measure water clarity, water so murky with sediment you could scarcely see through it would rate 50 NTU. Drinking water is required to be at 5 NTU or below. Water from Deep North is at 2 NTU.

That could change when the pumping reaches lower levels of the cavern, which is more than half full of crushed or blasted rock.

"The potential for different mishaps still exists," said Laurie Ferguson Craig of Alaskans for Juneau. "At what point do the pumps stir it up and cause it to come out again?"

Hubbard expects the water quality to change as the level gets lowered, which is why the water will be tested every 50 feet to 100 feet.

"It's not bad water, at least that which we can test," Hubbard said, "But we'll just have to see."

Kvaerner Environmental, the company hired by Echo Bay Alaska to clean up the mine, has al-

ready begun voluntary work on the mine under state supervision, though there is no published plan yet. Hubbard and Joe Petrillo of Kvaerner promised to provide the closure team with a summary of the cleanup work.

"There's a lot of data that have been developed with EPA and DEC that indicate what conditions are currently in the mine, which is what I think people should focus on," Petrillo said.

Besides the pumping permit, Kvaerner must get a permit to leave railroad ties and other structures in the mine tunnels. The final phase of closing the mine will be to secure it, Petrillo said.

Echo Bay previously asked the city, which co-owns the mine, to release it from liability. That won't happen now, said City Manager Dave Palmer.

In response to the investigators' reports, the state will also consider reopening a 1994 report on the death of more than 300 Dolly Varden in Gold Creek. At the time, the report concluded the primary cause of the fish death was lack of water in the stream. Though any fish left from the incident are too old to retest, Deborah Rudis of U.S. Fish and Wildlife said she would see if any other possible causes should be added to the fish kill report.

The federal documents are not likely to lead to new state prosecution, said Assistant Attorney General Marie Sansone. The state got a \$250,000 settlement from Echo Bay in 1994 after a state investigation turned up similar allegations of unreported oil spills and illegal wastewater discharges into Gold Creek.

"The issues are really pretty much the same," Sansone said. "It's just now there's additional information to work with."

Species...

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ment of Fish and Game, 10 percent of the 50,000 eaglets in the United States are in Alaska. Alaskan eaglets have been shipped to several states to repopulate those areas.

To remove a species from an endangered list, biologists with the Fish and Wildlife Service must first determine whether the species has returned to a sustainable level and whether it has a suitable habitat for likely survival. A proposal is made to "downgrade" a species or "delist" it as "threatened." After a review period, a final decision is made on the species. All this often takes a year or more, officials said.

The 29 include such well-known species as the Peregrine falcon, bald eagle, and Michigan wolf - all of which have been widely publicized comebacks in recent years. And there are less secure plants such as the bladder-pod; the Hooveria star, which is found on a small federal land in California; the Tinian monarch, a bird found on a Pacific island in the northern Mariana chain.

Stimson

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one of its 65-foot ships to Kodiak and transfer the Bering Sea vessel to the Alaska. The division has enforcement vessels.

Officials said the vessel, which cost \$3.8 million plus \$300,000 for equipment, is a good buy. Funds came from a settlement of criminal charges related to illegal trawling in the 1990s near South Unimak.

No-fly...

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could engage," Capt. Chris Prusak, an F-15 pilot, told the AP.

"They were just taunting us," Prusak said of the Iraqi fighters.

Air Force Lt. Mark Reents, another F-15 pilot, said in an interview: "We were initially pushed 90 miles to the south" by his mili-

with Iraqis. After several days of violations, "incrementally, we were allowed to move north," he said.

Both pilots continue to fly F-15s for the Air Force's First Fighter Wing based at Langley Air Force Base, Va.

Iraq began the series of incursions into the no-fly zone last Sept. 29, sending small numbers

the prohibited area daily, usually two planes at a time. A senior defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the Iraqis would turn on ground-based radars to determine when there were few American planes in the immediate area. They would then carve shallow arcs below the 33rd parallel, which marks the northern end of the southern no-fly

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nonenforcement check of the vessel would be made, followed by inspections when public comments were received or the Alaska Gastineau Channel smoky.

Starting a city-based