The Legacy of World's Fair Mine

By Blue Evening Star

A presentation I attended last year in Tucson provided a sobering account of actions set in motion long ago that are causing health problems for all living things here and now. The presentation was part of an annual event, Researcher Days, held by the Sonoran Institute and Friends of the Santa Cruz River, in which they showcase research done each year on the Santa Cruz River watershed.

The subject of the presentation was "acid mining drainage impacts on invertebrate communities and food webs and bioaccumulation of inorganic contaminants from post-mining activity in the Patagonia Mountains." In this study, geologists and biologists are working together to find sources and destinations of heavy metal pollution. Two scientists, Jessica Gwinn and Peter Reinthal, are studying and comparing Alum Creek and its surrounding watershed with Humbolt and Harshaw Creeks. Alum Creek is the site of the World's Fair Mine, which was closed in 1940. They assess the health of the creeks by counting aquatic invertebrates. When the water quality is good, they find many happy little mayflies and caddis flies, which thrive only in healthy streams.

Humbolt and Harshaw Creeks are full of mayflies and caddis flies. Alum Creek is severely polluted. They found only blood worms and cannibalistic beetles along its stinky banks. More than 70 years after the closing of the World's Fair Mine, Alum Creek continues to pollute all that is downstream.

Gwinn and Reinthal noted that there are 60,000 abandoned mines in Arizona today. The usual practice is for mining companies to cap the mine to stop harmful chemicals from leaking out, but it is likely (although not proven) that dust continues to carry these chemicals, so capping may not be sufficient. The only way to prove whether the chemicals are spreading via dust in the air would be to set up dust filters to determine the quantity and types of heavy metals being distributed.

Gwinn and Reinthal have found airborne deposition of lead and mercury throughout the entire Patagonia area. They highly recommended not eating fish from Peña Blanca Lake because they found a very high mercury content in fish from that water. They also found lead and mercury in fish from Lake Patagonia, although in lower amounts than in those from Peña Blanca Lake. They don't recommend eating fish from Lake Patagonia, either. The conclusion from their research is that mines closed for many decades continue to pollute.

For more information, go to *www.earthworksaction.org/issues/detail/acid_mine_drainage#.U8xbmLEq9u4*

Director of Patagonia Art Center Resigns

PRT Staff

Faye Finley, who has served as director of the Patagonia Creative Arts Center since Gail Jacobson left the position a year ago, announced her resignation as of June 30. She will remain available to assist the center's new director, Cassina Farley, as needed over the next year and then intends to go back to school to earn a master's degree in counseling.

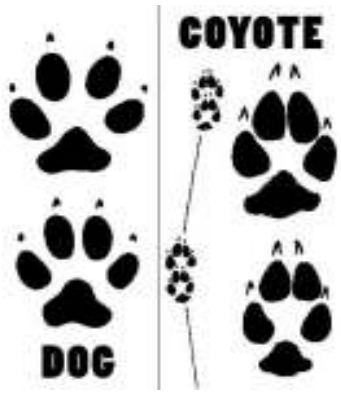
Faye Finley

Answer to Our Wild Neighbors Tracking Quiz:

Coyote (Canis latrans)

The coyote is a species of canine found throughout North and Central America, ranging from Panama in the south, north through Mexico, the United States, and Canada. It occurs as far north as Alaska and in all but the northernmost portions of Canada.

Though coyotes have been observed to travel in large groups, they primarily hunt in pairs. Typical packs consist of six closely related adults, yearlings, and young. Coyotes are primarily nocturnal but can often be seen during daylight hours in fields, forests, and even cities. A coyote's voice consists of howls, yips, yelps, and barks; the image of a coyote howling at the moon is a popular motif in the southwest (and elsewhere), though in the wild they do not wear bandanas.



Note the differences between coyote tracks and dog tracks.

They are omnivores and eat a wide variety of foods. The coyote's consumption of rodents has been an effective control; when coyotes are eliminated from an area, the rodent population can explode.

Traditional stories about a trickster or culture hero called Coyote appear in dozens of Native American nations from Canada to Mexico