

Patagonia Area Resource Alliance

Report to the Community

2014 Activities and Accomplishments

Watchdog Activities:

Filed a complaint in federal court with Defenders of Wildlife against the US Forest Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service for their unlawful approval of the Regal Resources Sunnyside mineral drilling project in southern Arizona's Coronado National Forest, in the Alum Gulch area of the Patagonia Mountains. The Sunnyside project approval violates environmental laws and poses a potential threat to endangered species and the safety of drinking water for Patagonia area residents. The Coronado National Forest, Patagonia Mountains and waterways in our region support some of the world's most imperiled wildlife, including jaguar, ocelot, lesser long-nosed bat, Mexican spotted owl, and yellow-billed cuckoo.

Discovered and reported historic mines overflowing with toxic, orange water in the Patagonia Mountains. Our actions and subsequent generation of publicity about the problem created funding for the US Geological Survey and the US Forest Service to survey and address the issues of abandoned mines in the Patagonia Mountains in the Coronado National Forest.

Maintain a wildlife monitoring project in partnership with Defenders of Wildlife and Sky Island Alliance for the areas in the Patagonia Mountains most threatened by proposed mining activities.

Advocacy Activities:

Released a peer-reviewed report with the national organization EARTHWORKS, "The Hermosa Mine: Potential Impacts to Patagonia's Water Supply." The report uses geologic and hydrologic studies from project developer Wildcat Silver, the United States Geologic Survey, the Arizona Department of Water Resources, the Town of Patagonia, and others, as well as analyzes historic contamination issues caused by mining in the Patagonia Mountains. We conclude in our report that the seemingly inescapable realities of acid drainage and water consumption impacts pose too great a risk to Patagonia.

Coordinated and submitted comments on Wildcat Silver's Hermosa drilling plan draft Environmental Assessment with Defenders of Wildlife, Arizona Mining Reform Coalition, Center for Biological Diversity, Earthworks, and Sky Island Alliance.

Hosted a community workshop to empower residents to comment on the Hermosa EA comprising of an overview of the Hermosa drilling proposal and its likely impacts; a NEPA presentation and how to comment on an EA by Jenny Neeley, Attorney at Law; and a presentation of area wildlife by Biologist, Sergio Avila, of Sky Island Alliance.

Submitted comments with a coalition of organizations regarding the proposed United States Forest Service Guidelines on Groundwater, advocating for groundwater protection and consideration of potential impacts regarding all agency activities in our National Forests, especially in regards to hardrock mining. We stressed the importance of the USFS to place more emphasis on preventing and avoiding impacts to groundwater from hardrock mining. Unfortunately, hardrock mining often results in adverse impacts to groundwater, and these impacts are often underestimated during the NEPA process.

Advocated for EPA's new definition of waters of the United States. The headwaters of 40 percent of the watersheds in the west are contaminated by mining. The new rule will restore protections to most streams, regardless of size or frequency of flow, important because of the many intermittent and ephemeral streams that contribute to the Sonoita Creek watershed and the Patagonia Municipal Supply Watershed.

Participated with the Coronado Planning Partnership to draft comments on the USFS Coronado National Forest Plan. The Forest Plan provides broad direction for managing natural resources for Coronado National Forest.

Submitted comments for the objection period on the Rosemont Mine Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Submitted comments advocating endangered species status for the Western yellow-billed cuckoo. Now listed as federally threatened, we further advocated for more designated critical habitat in the Patagonia Mountains for yellow-billed cuckoo recovery.

Outreach Activities:

Attended a Rural Policy Forum by Arizona Rural Development Council to explore economic and community development beyond an extraction economy through citizen led economic development that are proven to be more sustainable, less expensive and strengthen community bonds through the process of community problem solving. Also given practical tools on regional marketing and tourism strategies.

Attended the Western Mining Action Network biennial conference. Tribes, community organizers, attorneys, researchers/ scientists, activists and conservation groups were represented, bringing together expertise and communities in need to strategize about the challenges facing those impacted by mining. The conference provided an excellent venue for technical training, increasing skills, exchanging information on company track records, networking, and strategizing with the goal of improving mining industry performance and protecting communities and the environment.

Ongoing meetings and collaborations with Defenders of Wildlife, Sky Island Alliance, Save the Scenic Santa Ritas, Arizona Mining Reform Coalition, TNC Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve, Earthworks and Tucson Audubon for continuing advocacy for the Patagonia Mountains and raising awareness of area mining threats.

Hosted 2 day tour of proposed mine sites in Patagonia Mountains for the Defenders of Wildlife Southwest Team and Legal Team.

Hosted a visit with Pete Dronkers of Earthworks with a tour of proposed mining sites in the Patagonia mountains including a flyover of the Patagonia Mountains, Santa Rita Mountains and Green Valley open pit mines.

Sponsored the Journey Stories closing program with a presentation by Diana Hadley from the Arizona State Museum about the history of Arizona Trails that run through greater Arizona region.

Participated the Patagonia Trails Day and EARTHfest event, Patagonia's 4th of July celebration and the Patagonia Fall Festival.

Presented our documentary, "Mining Patagonia" at the Wild and Scenic film festival in Bisbee.

Hosted Rosemont Ours movie and reception at the Tin Shed Theater with the filmmaker, director and musicians. Rosemont Ours: A Field Guide, is a video production performed by trained modern dancers celebrating the plants and animals of the northern Santa Rita Mountains and nearby riparian areas of Southern Arizona.

Attendance at the Patagonia Town council meetings and workshops. The Mayor has remarked that the Town Council's jurisdiction is only on matters within the Town boundaries. As there exists proposed activities that would directly affect the Town of Patagonia outside of Town boundaries, that limited jurisdiction creates a void to the potential detriment of the Town. To fill that void, the Patagonia Area Resource Alliance is working for the preservation and protection of the Patagonia Mountain region for the benefit of the entire community of Patagonia.

PARA recognizes that the health and economic prosperity of the Town of Patagonia is tied deeply to the well-being of the Patagonia Mountains and the Harshaw / Sonoita Creek watershed. They are the source of our drinking water, clean air and the centerpiece for the tourism that drives our local economy.

A Final Word:

As a direct result of our watchdog activities, we have prevented any mining activity from starting on public land in the Patagonia Mountains. We had five mining exploration proposals in 2012 by international mining companies. We are down to three. Projects that have been withdrawn are the Providencia drilling proposal in Guajolote Flat and the Javelina drilling proposal on Red Mountain.

Your financial contributions are critical to PARA's ongoing work and necessary for us to continue our mission. We are committed to protecting the Patagonia Mountains, our air, our water, and our communities.