The Facts As We Know Them

There has been speculation from residents as to the nature and scope of AMI’s current mining operations in the Patagonia Mountains. Here are the facts that we have been able to establish. Some we know from experience, some come from AMI’s website, and some from Don Taylor’s presentation to the council.

- Arizona Mining Inc. is a Canadian corporation that does exploratory mining. It finds underground ore deposits, maps them, and usually sells the rights and the land to a mining company.
- AMI currently owns 17,000+ acres of land that includes their original patented Hermosa Mine and the land they acquired from the state of Arizona in exchange for mitigating the leakage from the old Trench Mine.
- To date, AMI has drilled 270 holes on their property, finding where ore pockets are located. These ore samples come from 3,000 to 5,000 feet deep in the earth. AMI has referred to this as a “world-class mineral deposit.”
- Using a generator to provide electricity, AMI currently has 15 drill rigs working 24 hours a day, seven days a week with an eight-day break for drillers every three weeks. They are able to do this because mining activity in Arizona is exempt from restrictive noise and light ordinances.
- The drilling site is serviced by fuel trucks, water trucks, portable toilet trucks, heavy construction trucks, and assorted delivery trucks with water tanks, pipe, etc., which access the site by way of Harshaw Road, a narrow road with no shoulders.
- There are approximately 30 pick-up trucks involved in this phase of drilling that started last spring.
- AMI has spent more than $60 million dollars so far on this project. On their website they say, “We will continue the aggressive drill program already in place at least through the end of 2016.”
- There are armed security guards on AMI’s property and cars that stop on Harshaw Road as it passes through their property, are told to “move on.” Don Taylor said at the October 26 meeting that this harassment would stop.
- According to Taylor, wells on the AMI property are providing enough water for the project. He says if mining negatively impacts Patagonia’s water supply, AMI is willing to take part in a comprehensive water study done by a third party, if necessary. He added that they also have the option of piping water to their operations from “a ranch to the east.”
- AMI employs 200 people for the Taylor Deposit project. Drillers are living in trailers and rented housing. Some have had to find accommodations in Nogales.
- AMI’s remediation work at the Trench Mine is moving ahead. Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) has approved plans for a passive water treatment plant on the property, which is just beginning to get underway. This construction will mean more heavy machinery going to and coming from the site.
- It will be many months before economic and engineering assessments are made. Permitting can take anywhere from two to six years.

For those who oppose the drilling, as well as those who are in favor, the next important marker is the outcome of the scoping comments. Based on this, AMI will either move forward, or be required to submit an EA or EIS to establish whether its plan of operations will adversely affect the environment.

Forest Service Issues Scoping Notice For Taylor Project

Late this summer American Mining (AMI) submitted a plan of operation to the Forest Service, proposing to extend their drilling onto public land. The Forest Service issued a Scoping Notice to the public in September asking for citizen comments. On its website, the Forest Service explains: “Citizens often have valuable information about places and resources that they value and the potential environmental, social, and economic effects that proposed federal actions may have on those places and resources. NEPA’s requirements provide you the means to work with the agencies so they can take your information into account.”

The comments had to be submitted by October 11. According to Forest Ranger, Daisy Kinsey, there are “a lot of comments” and a “decision is many months out.” If, after reading the public comments, the Forest Service decides “there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action,” they will issue a “categorical exclusion” and AMI’s proposed drilling on public land will go ahead. If, however, there are found to be significant environmental impacts, they will ask for an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an even more detailed Environmental Impact Study (EIS).

Here are some of the comments published on the Forest Service Website:

“Because of AMI’s existing drilling over the summer the main housing in town, the hotel, was filled up with mine workers. As was most of a new trailer park. Where will tourists and other visitors like hunters stay if there are even more miners in town for longer periods?”

“The sustainable tourism jobs will be lost forever if our public lands are permanently destroyed by mining. In 2008, visitor spending in Santa Cruz County, (cont. on next page)
A full-length issue of the Patagonia Regional Times has finally returned. Your response to our plea for additional financial and volunteer support convinced us that the paper can continue. Thank you! Our goal is a total of $10,000 by December 31 and an anonymous donor has already promised us a generous matching gift of $1,000.

As we go to press with our November issue, we have raised $6,077 since our fundraising campaign began September 15, so we are more than halfway to meeting our goal.

We have always been a free newspaper and our board decided that, no matter what, we should continue to be so. But if you want this important regional communicator to continue—online and on the page—we need your help over the long term. From this point forward, we must depend on roughly equal contributions from advertising revenue and community donations to cover our costs.

Our ability to pay for a few part-time positions remains a critical factor in our longevity and there are positions (both volunteer and paid) that still need to be filled.

We are fortunate to have found an excellent Editor-in-Chief whose professional skills and enthusiasm make her well suited to the job. You may have already met our energetic and optimistic new editor, Ali Morse. Her talents and curiosity have led her down interesting career paths over the years, working in various capacities for non-profits in Colorado and Alaska. This included work in an underground abandoned mine, overseeing a pilot project to mitigate acid mine drainage. She’s been a writer, a poet, an appraiser, an event coordinator, a food and wine specialist, and speaks fluent Spanish.

Ali has begun to reorganize PRT’s production system (the process whereby incoming articles are reviewed, edited, and proofed). This month she has also been editing, fundraising, and reporting. But we conceived of her position as one that is aided by an Editorial Assistant, and that’s a paid position we still need to fill (or we will find Ali some morning burnt to a crisp).

We are also in need of a bookkeeper, as Marti Chase will be leaving us (see page 18), and a Patagonia reporter. Robert David Dorney (see page 26) is taking on our Sonoita area reporting.

Scoping Comments, cont.

Arizona amounted to 257 million dollars and accounted for over 2000 jobs. Government revenue generated by travel spending was 13.4 million dollars.”

The tourism industry in Patagonia and the surrounding areas is a sustainable, ecologically sensitive, revenue-producing industry; an industry that is NOT compatible with hard rock NOR open pit mining operations that dirty the water, foul the air, frighten the wildlife, and pollute the night air with light. An industry that does NOT threaten water supplies, endangered species, the DARK SKIES initiative, or the lives of humans and animals as literally hundreds of trucks race up and down town, county and forest roads in a race to make money by shipping our resources to foreign lands.”

“We have far greater values in the land as a whole than we do in this kind of resource extraction. The antiquated mining law is no longer in accordance with modern day reality. If they want to use that law to develop this claim, they should do it with a pick and shovel. There are many residents here whose livelihoods and personal well-being will be disastrously injured by the activities of mining. We do not want our lives and homes sacrificed for the external exploitation of any mining company.”

Nearly everyone commented on water, the quantity, the quality, the danger of erosion and flooding, the fact that we don’t know enough about our vast watershed. These are all concerns of people who work and live in the region.

If you would like to read more comments, go to https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/Letter/1309956?project=50097

Finally, we’re proud to announce that we’ve designed an easy way for you to help keep the presses rolling. Go to our website, www.patagoniaregionaltimes.org, and you will see the yellow “Donate Now” button. Click on this and your transaction will be astonishingly simple. You can make a one-time donation or easily set up an account that will charge your credit card each month. With a sustaining donation, you help us to see far into our financial future. Together we can keep this vital community resource alive and well, for many years to come. As always, we greatly appreciate your support.