



File Code: 1950

Date: September 17, 2013

Dear Interested Party:

The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has completed a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (draft EIS) on Golden Sunlight Mine's proposed amendment for its operating permit (00065). You can obtain an electronic version of the draft EIS on DEQ's web site <http://deq.mt.gov/eis.mcp.x>. DEQ will accept public comment on this draft EIS until October 20, 2013. DEQ will hold a public meeting and accept public comments on the draft EIS on October 8th from 6 to 8 pm at the Whitehall Community Center.

The Golden Sunlight Mine is an existing open pit mine located near Whitehall, Montana. The state of Montana issued Operating Permit No. 00065 to the mine in 1972. DEQ has previously approved fourteen amendments to the operating permit, several of which have allowed expansion of the gold mine. In September of 2012, DEQ received Golden Sunlight's application for Amendment 15, which would allow further expansion of the Mineral Hill Pit and the mining of a new pit located to the north of the Mineral Hill Pit. On April 30, 2013, DEQ determined that the company's application for Amendment 15 was complete and compliant and, pursuant to Section 82-4-337, MCA, issued a draft permit for the proposed expansion.

Pursuant to Section 82-4-337(1)(f), MCA, issuance of the draft permit as a final permit is the proposed state action subject to the environmental review required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) (Section 75-1-201, *et seq.*, MCA). Section 75-1-201(1)(iv), MCA, requires the preparation of an environmental impact statement for state actions that may significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The environmental impact statement must include a detailed statement on the environmental impact of the proposed action, alternatives to the proposed action, and a no action alternative. Pursuant to this statute, the draft EIS analyzed a No Action Alternative, a Proposed Action Alternative (the company's proposed amendment), an Agency-Modified Alternative, and a North Area Pit Backfill Alternative.

ARM 17.4.617 requires DEQ to include in an environmental impact statement an identification of the agency's preferred alternative, if any, and the reasons for the preference. At this juncture, DEQ does not have a preferred alternative. The alternatives that do not require backfill of the North Area Pit (the Proposed Action Alternative and the Agency-Modified Alternative) and the North Area Pit Backfill Alternative each have their respective advantages and disadvantages.

The alternatives that do not require backfill would provide some terrestrial wildlife habitat and habitat for bats and raptors and would allow for the construction of a secondary system to capture impacted groundwater should the proposed perimeter dewatering wells fail. These alternatives would also impact visual resources, although that impact would be mitigated.

The North Area Pit Backfill Alternative would provide terrestrial wildlife habitat and, because the pit would be backfilled and revegetated, would have noticeably less visual impact than the alternatives that do not require backfill. The backfill in the pit, however, would likely foreclose the opportunity to implement secondary systems to capture the impacted groundwater in the event that the perimeter dewatering wells fail.

DEQ will make its decision after reviewing public comments on the draft EIS and the additional environmental analysis that will likely be generated in response to those comments. For more information, or to comment, please contact:

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I welcome and look forward to your participation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tracy Stone-Manning". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Tracy Stone-Manning, Director
Montana Department of Environmental Quality