Comstock Residents Continue to Challenge Open Pit Mining

by Alexander Yturide

In the Summer 2011 and Spring 2012 issues of Bristlecone, we featured stories about the mining project initiated by Comstock Mining, Inc. (CMI) in Lyon and Storey Counties. We last reported on the story as initial moves were being made by CMI, citizens, and government entities in the Comstock, and it was anyone’s guess how the situation was going to play out.

Many citizens of the Comstock and elsewhere feel the lifestyle and historic value of the district are being threatened by this extensive mining project, already underway in the Lucerne Pit in Lyon County just off Highway 342. Members of the Comstock Residents Association (CRA), an organization of citizens formed to contest certain aspects of the mining project, have been outspoken on their views about the open pit mining and the possible degradation of the historic quality of the Comstock District.

When asked why strengthening regulations could make the mining on the Comstock more agreeable to citizens, one member of the CRA said “So that potentially, in an ideal world, mining could occur, it probably wouldn’t be surface mining, but it would be underground mining and that mining would be accomplished in such a fashion that it would not degrade …the landscape of the historic district--like open pit mining does--but could potentially even add to the district because they would be similar in style.”

Comstock Mine Project consists of approximately 5,900 acres of mining claims and parcels in the Comstock and Silver City Mining Districts. The acreage is comprised of approximately 1,350 acres of patented claims and surface parcels (private lands) and 4,550 acres of unpatented claims, administered by the United States Bureau of Land Management (BLM). CMI has not yet carried out any operations on public continued on page 2
“Water water everywhere but not a drop of it to drink” cried the ancient mariner in Coldridge’s poem. Imagine a time when water is respected and viewed as the sacred elixir that it is. Nevada will have more water in open pit mine lakes (pit lakes) than any other state in the union, and this water will be as unpalatable and undrinkable as seawater; in fact, even less so. Fresh water desperately sought by the ancient mariner is becoming more scarce than ever, and in Nevada, one of the most arid of states, wasting and poisoning – i.e. disrespecting water, should be a high crime. I question what right any entity has to plunder springs and mine groundwater.

Our work seems to return constantly to defending water, from the sacred Shoshone springs at Mt. Tenabo to the agricultural fields in Diamond Valley near Mt. Hope. Globally, access to clean water is being viewed as a human right; thus, any activity that undermines this access violates that right. Water should not be treated as a commodity.

In Nevada, the mining industry is guilty of this government agencies are complicit by indifference. But, we live in a democracy so all us are the government. Please join us in our Water Protection Program, which seeks to preserve the quality and quantity of water in the Great Basin and beyond. A significant aspect or this work is now focused on pit lakes from open pit mining - see our piece on pit lakes in the Great Basin Roundup.

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lands; however, CMI trucks have been passing through public lands from their Billy the Kid Lucerne Pit to their processing facility at American Flat prior to filing an application with the Bureau of Land Management for a right of way. CMI was barred by a cease-and-desist order issued by the BLM on May 21st, 2012 from using this route. This stopped them from achieving the projected pour date for their first haul of gold & silver in late summer 2012. They would not be kept waiting long, however, as they were able to conduct the initial pour on September 29th, 2012. For photographs of the event, refer to Dawn Cranfield’s 12 Dec 2012 article “A Mining Company With a Heart of Gold-Comstock Mining, Inc,” available on The Guardian Express’ website: www.guardianlv.com

The BLM’s cease and desist order forced the CMI haul trucks onto State Highway 342, causing much traffic disruption. In January, CMI filed a right of way application for the “…construction, maintenance, and use of the Lucerne haul road across public land segments between their Lucerne pit mining operation and processing facility…” as stated in the BLM’s 16 January 2013 press release. The application goes a bit beyond “right-of-way” since “CMI is proposing that the haul road be an exclusive use road…” while offering that “…use of this road could reduce CMI’s use of State Highway 342 as a haul road.” The BLM is preparing an Environmental Assessment regarding the proposition with an expected release date and decision in the spring of 2013,

If CMI continues on its current trajectory, or expands its operation into more acreage in its possession and onto BLM land, what will be the fate of the Comstock? “Certainly a degraded Historic Landmark” said Larry Wahrenbrock, a longtime resident of the area, “and whether or not it becomes degraded sufficiently to cost it its status as a landmark, is hard to predict, but any loss of historic resources further degrades the experience a traveler would have when they come to the Comstock to learn about and see what happened here.”
**Up Close and Personal with Carrie Dann**

by Terri Chio Gonzales

“We cannot be severed from the breasts that feed us,” Carrie Dann, Western Shoshone Grandmother, said tearfully in reference to Mother Earth to a gathering of people fighting for rights to their aboriginal lands. I viewed this scene in a documentary film which Larson Bill of the Western Shoshone Defense Project showed me. Later, I had the privilege of meeting, chatting and sharing bahu (smoke) with Carrie Dann.

I was born and raised in a small coastal community in the southernmost part of the Philippines. Before coming to Nevada, my ideas of Native American Indians were from John Wayne movies. My mother had my ears pierced as a baby and I have worn gold earrings since. Now I see things differently after watching documentaries and talking with Carrie Dann. I have decided to remove the gold bracelet my mother gave me that I have worn for many years without taking it off not even when I shower or sleep. It will be my silent protest against the dirty gold.

I was both starstruck and overwhelmed meeting Carrie but she and I bonded instantly because she made it easy. Carrie is one not pass up a question and keeps the conversation going with her witty and profound remarks. At one point she asked me if I believe in “god” to which I gamely replied, “Define god and I will answer your question,” at which point she broke into laughter and told me, “Now we’re talking”. I laughed with her and in my mind said, “When I am old and wrinkly I want to be just like her. Carrie has always had her hair short, wears denim jeans, smokes Marlboro Lights and keeps her cigarette butts in a pocket of her bag till she finds a trash bin to dispose them in. She has a toothless smile and an infectious laugh, and an almost childlike presence. She says whatever she wants to say and does not apologize for who and what she is or what she thinks.

To the question of what she thought was the most effective way to move her advocacy forward, she said, “Working together with others. I could not have done it alone.” It almost sounded simple and I uttered that to her. She looked at me with those deep brown eyes and told me that it was not at all easy. She said some people thought she was crazy and must be out of her mind for fighting the government and “I wish more of my people are as crazy-like” and laughed again.

I grilled her with questions for almost an hour, mostly personal, like a child to a grandmother. We shared experiences of our people and how we came to be. Her sharing was more of her own personal experience and knowledge whereas mine was more from what I learned in school and from stories of my parents. I told her stories about my coastal communities at home, informed her of my purpose in coming here and the things that I want to do when I go back home.

Our conversation went from environmental advocacy to human rights, to stories of creation. She would not tell me the creation story of the Western Shoshone and I could not blame her because not everybody can understand and not everybody can believe. She told me to find an elder in my people and ask our creation story. She told me to know and understand my past because it makes up who and what I am, and that I should be proud of it no matter what.

On our way out of the building where we met and talked, we saw a plastic globe in one of the offices and she asked me, “Show me your land.” As I pointed my finger to the dots on the southernmost part of the Philippine Islands, she said, “Man, that’s your land? I can’t even see it.” Then she turned the plastic globe to North America and said, “This is our land but the government says it is not ours, but we were here long before they came here!”

Carrie is very eloquent, very opinionated, very intelligent, and very sure of herself. But up close and personal, she is just a toothless grandmother who smokes cigarettes, wear jeans, and loves to laugh and joke about almost everything.
GBRW Submits Comments on Long Canyon Project (North Pequops)

GBRW submitted detailed scoping comments to the BLM on this project on September 4, 2012. We closed by reiterating, “Again, we would like to emphasize the special character of the North Pequops. There is also mining exploration on the west side of the range and given that Newmont has purchased extensive mining claims along the North Pequops it is highly likely that additional mining operations are possible. BLM must evaluate any potential for future mining and other projects and how the wilderness character of the lands would be affected, and if so, craft a mitigation plan that will allow these lands to be available for wilderness as they are now.”

We are awaiting the draft Environmental Impact Statement, likely to be released late 2013 or early 2014. At that time we will alert people about what action to take for this next stage in the process.

Arturo Mine Expansion – Carlin Trend

The Arturo Project is an expansion of Barrick Gold’s existing Dee Gold Mine (BDMV), which currently is in reclamation and closure. The expansion is quite considerable and the proposed action would include: expansion of the existing open pit; construction of two new waste rock disposal facilities; construction of a new heap leach pad and gold processing facilities; upgrading and realigning segments of the Bootstrap Haul Road; construction and/or relocation of support facilities, including office buildings and a communication site; construction and installation of new power transmission lines; and continued surface exploration within the project area.

Proposed project construction would begin in early 2013, pending authorization of permits and approvals. Mine operations would begin within 8 months of construction startup and would continue for approximately 8 years, depending on mining and economic conditions. Ore processing would continue for an additional 2 years beyond the end of mining operations. To the extent possible, reclamation would occur concurrently with mining operations. Final reclamation would be completed during a 4-year period following cessation of mining. At the end of mine life, BDMV would reclaim all the facilities associated with the project except BLM roads and the expanded pit which will be fenced off and left to become another poor water quality pit lake. Closure monitoring could continue for 30 years or more, depending on the project’s final closure plan and its implementation.

GBRW’s main concern is the impact of the expanded open pit on the groundwater as well as the creation of one more pit lake with unusable water, wasting more precious groundwater. In our comments we concluded by saying, “Overall, the DEIS does not present a convincing case that the infiltration water will not degrade waters of the state, and assumes that long term water quality in the pit lake does not degrade waters of the state. BLM needs to work with BDMV to develop an alternative mine plan that will clearly not violate state law. Therefore, GBRW does not support the proposed action at this time.”

We’ll be evaluating the State of Nevada Water Pollution Control Permit expected this summer. Watch for possible action on this in the next year.

Lyon County: Anaconda Mine Update

A cleanup plan for the contaminated groundwater plume coming from the old mine near Yerington into neighborhoods north of it seems a bit closer, based on what we heard at the EPA’s community meeting in Yerington on January 31. Many questions need complete resolution before work can actually begin, including (finally) what risk does the contamination pose to human health. A public meeting to discuss cleanup options based on public comments and the work plan submitted by the EPA contractors was held in Reno, March 5 to March 7. John Hadder attended a portion of the meeting, noting that both interim and long-term strategies were being developed to stop the plume from expanding and to potentially remove contaminated groundwater onsite. Check the EPA website for details: www.epa.gov, click on the Nevada map, and follow the link to “Anaconda Copper Mine”.

As a result of the agreement struck in September 2012 between exploration company Singatse Peak (SPL) and the EPA for SPL to upgrade the fluids management system in the mine, listing the site on the National Priorities list for clean-up is on hold. SPL now owns a portion and plans to remine there if it is determined to be feasible.
Pit Lake Reclamation is before the Nevada Legislature

GBRW has been working with the Nevada Conservation League and Nevada State Legislator David Bobzien on changes to the Nevada Revised Statutes regarding the open pit lakes that often remain after mining.

Currently, the water in these lakes is wasted and in our view degraded when compared to the surrounding groundwater, which is the water source of the pit lake. We are proposing a requirement that open pit lakes be reclaimed for minimum recreational use; this would apply to existing mines as well. Once the beneficial use of recreational use is established, specific water quality standards will need to be applied to the pit lake, and safe public access to the lake must be insured. As it stands now, open pit lakes are fenced off, which is supposed to prevent human intrusion indefinitely.

In our legislation, if a mining company wishes to have a pit lake excluded from the proposed reclamation requirement, the company will need to make a strong case to the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection that reclamation is infeasible, thus requiring a specific decision point and more open to public scrutiny.

The bill was introduced March 18 in the assembly - AB 346. See you at the Legislature.

UPDATE: LAND TRANSFER BILL, PUMPKIN HOLLOW MINE, AND WOVOKA WILDERNESS

GBRW has been following the progress of a BLM-City of Yerington land transfer proposal since last year. We met with Senator Reid’s staff in 2012 expressing our concerns that once the land is conveyed to the city, the mine would no longer be required to develop an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The bill, now S. 159, was reintroduced on January 28 by Senator Dean Heller as the Lyon County Conservation and Economic Development Act of 2013. We are happy to report that this version of the bill now contains the following:

(4) APPLICABLE LAW.—Beginning on the date on which the Federal land is conveyed to the City, the development of and conduct of activities on the Federal land shall be subject to all applicable Federal laws (including regulations).

This language would require the EIS for the mine project. And, as a kicker there is a proposal for designating approximately 48,000 acres of BLM land south of Smith Valley as the Wovoka Wilderness. Thank you for sending your comments last year and to the wilderness community for making this land-transfer bill good for all.

GBRW takes BLM to Court on Mt. Hope Moly Mine

GBRW and the Western Shoshone Defense Project filed a “Motion for Preliminary Injunction” on February 21, 2013, challenging the decision of the United States Department of the Interior to approve the Mount Hope Project. The proposed Eureka Moly LLC molybdenum mine would be located at the base of Mt. Hope, slightly northwest of Eureka, Nevada.

The state water engineer approved giving Eureka Moly access to the water of the Diamond and Kobe Valleys for use in the project, currently in the early stages of development. This use of an already over-allocated water source in the area negatively affects all residents of the region and it’s likely to do a great deal more damage to the farming operations in Diamond Valley.

In a business where if the springs go dry and people are forced to remove their herd from the range and the loss of farm crops without water there runs a risk of bankruptcy. An agricultural way of life has been maintained in this area for generations. The Mount Hope Mine, on the central-eastern border of Diamond Valley, threatens to undo all of the hard work of the families, who have carved out a profitable life for themselves and their descendants.

The way of life for the residents is much like it has been for generations hard, honest, and free - just the way they like it. The residents of Diamond and Kobe Valleys rely on the cattle trade and their crops of alfalfa and timothy hay to get them through the year. Ranchers are isolated out there: “We live, work and play all right here, 100 miles to Albertson’s, 250 miles to Costco. We do not go out to eat unless we go 100 miles to town for something,” said Carol Bailey, a family rancher/farmer in Diamond Valley.

For ranchers like the Baileys, this isn’t just an industry, but a way of life. They love honest work and they love the land-- their memories and activities are inextricably tied to the landmarks of their place. They know this region better than anyone; people like them may be the last of those who have the knowledge and fortitude to prosper off the land. “I believe Nevada’s Centennial Ranches are like us and do things a lot the old way. How many

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**International Mining News**

**Newmont Projects in Peru Stir Massive Resistance, Threaten Sacred Waters**

by Alexander Yturibe

The operations and interests of Newmont Mining Company, one of the world’s largest gold producers, stretch across the globe. In recent years, Newmont’s appetite for more has brought the company to Peru in search of precious metals. The Yanacocha Mine, one of the largest gold producing mines in the world, sits high in the Andean mountains near Cajamarca, an important Inca site in the northern highlands. It was Newmont’s first investment in Peru.

Beginning in 1994, investigations into allegations of corruption by Vladamiro Montesinos, then advisor to Peruvian President Fujimori, had escalated massive resistance to the mine into an international embarrassment for all parties involved. What was first a cry for help from the natives of the region due to dislocation, water toxicity and reallocation, and mercury-related illnesses became a rallying cry. Constant protesting and tales of corruption gained the world’s attention.

Today, Newmont has another interest in Peru: the $5 billion-dollar Minas Conga Project, near the headwaters of 5 rivers. Minas Conga will involve surface mining to extract metals from a large copper porphyry deposit thought to also hold gold deposits. Newmont seems to have learned from its earlier experience at Yanacocha and has the support of a small minority of residents because of reservoir-building projects. Newmont agreed to these projects only after construction at the mine was halted by President Ollanta Humala.

Still, many Peruvians could not accept the sad realities of large-scale mining operations in their homeland and its effects on their culture and environment, which may include draining four sacred lakes. Protests against the mine resumed in the area, leading to the deaths of 5 protesters by police in the city of Celendin July 3rd, 2012. For many in the area, the fight to stop the mine is far from over. Once again the eyes of the world are on Newmont’s presence in Peru.

![Yanacocha-Goldmine, near Cajamarca (Peru), August 6 2005. Photo: Euyasik](image)

**Salvadoran Activists Initiate “Water is More Precious than Gold” Tour**

by Susan Juetten

Activists from El Salvador are touring cities in the United States and Canada in March and April 2013 to gather support for their “Water is More Precious than Gold” campaign. The campaign aims to make El Salvador the first country to ban metal mining; at least 10 transnational corporations seek to extract gold and other precious metals buried under its northern mountains. The mountains are the primary source of water and clean air for this populous country, and are currently home to extensive local agriculture.

The speaking tour aims to spread the word about human rights, environmental abuses and other unjust practices of US and Canadian mining companies in El Salvador as well as other Latin American countries (companies include Pacific Rim mining, which recently acquired the majority stake in the Hog Ranch Mine in northern Washoe County, Nevada).

El Salvador is upstream from as many as 49 additional metal mining projects that are on its borders with the neighboring countries of Guatemala and Honduras, projects which also pose a probable threat to the waters of El Salvador. One such project, Goldcorps’ Cerro Blanco mine, is a short distance from the headwaters of the Lempa River, the main water source for over 60% of El Salvador’s residents.

Information from the website www.elsalvadorsolidarity.org

![Google Earth photo taken in the area of Pacific Rim’s El dorado project. Photo: LERM](image)

**International Fact Finding Mission to El Salvador**

The same group sponsoring the North American speaking tour, La Mesa, is also sponsoring a fact finding mission to El Salvador May 9-13, 2013. The organizers are inviting journalists, NGO’s, activists, policy makers and anyone else interested in supporting the courageous efforts of the people of El Salvador to put an end to metallic mining in their country. A second reason to join in the tour is to show solidarity with the growing global resistance to the devastating impacts of resource extractive industries. La Mesa is an inspiring force in this budding movement.

Great Basin Resource Watch has been invited to join this tour.
by Alexander Yturibe

PLAN, Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, is an organization “founded in 1994 to bring together diverse and potentially competing organizations into one cohesive force for social and environmental justice in Nevada.” (www.planevada.org). Congruent with GBRW’s mission to protect the communities and environment of the Great Basin, PLAN has been working to enhance the accountability of mining corporations operating in Nevada, among other worthy goals.

PLAN and other groups and individuals are seeking the passage of Senate Joint Resolution 15 (SJR 15), to remove loopholes in the Nevada Constitution that allow mining companies to be taxed at a lower rate than all other businesses. PLAN is urging Nevadans to help pass the resolution by lobbying their legislators and attending hearings. It must pass this legislative session before being brought to voters in 2014 or it will die.

GBRW is a member organization of PLAN and applauds PLAN’s efforts to increase the accountability of mining corporations operating in Nevada.

To follow the progress of SJR 15, log onto www.leg.state.nv.us, www.planevada.org, or request to be added to PLAN’s email action list. GBRW’s action list will also announce key actions related to SJR 15. Email John Hadder at john@gbrw.org to be added.

Follow legislative action about pit mine lakes visit www.protectnv.org, a project of Nevada Conservation League Education Fund (NCLEF), who is lobbying at the Legislature for conservation-related bill. Or go to GBRW’s pit lake action page: www.gbrw.org/take-action/191-pit-lake-action.

Remembering Betsy Gledhill

by John Hadder

I first met Betsy at a meeting of Sierra Interfaith Action for Peace on the eve of the 1991 invasion of Iraq. Her demeanor, then as always, was quiet resolve. As I became more active in progressive work I began to see her more often. I can still hear her say, “Oh Goodie” while showing her enthusiasm for a plan of action or encouraging news.

Betsy was at the forefront of human rights, non-violent action, and environmental protection activism. She was an avid supporter of our work at GBRW and a long-time Nevadan. She was a world traveler who brought that experience and perspective to our work here.

Betsy was also a prominent member of Citizen Alert and a board member during the late 1990’s as well as for Sunrise.

people in our country do you think know how to provide a high protein food source, off the grid, that can be walked right to your town? We are like the emergency food store for this country,” said Carol Bailey.

In the 1800’s, in keeping with the thinking of the time, government entities decided that mining would take precedence over everything else in Nevada, and today that decision is destroying communities and historical sites all across the Silver State and elsewhere. We need to amend this decision and stop mines that threaten to destroy communities. We must value those who have lived and worked the land for generations over those who will do irreparable damage while building an economy for just one generation.

The GBRW/WSDP appeal argues that “The Project will have immediate, irreparable, and permanent impacts to the local ranching and farming communities and families which have lived there since the 1860s and to the critical environmental, historical, cultural and wildlife resources that will be outright eliminated or significantly degraded by the Project.”


It is with the continued support of our donors that GBRW is able to pursue this and other issues in the Great Basin, giving people like the ranchers of Diamond Valley a greater voice in protecting their environment.

Thank you Betsy for making this world a little brighter.

Sustainable Resources to name a few. Her energy to promote positive change was infectious and she was a good example of leadership by example. It was difficult to discern when she actually retired.

She approached activism from an optimistic perspective – recognizing the negative but not dwelling on it. She would always ask, “What can we do?” And “do” was the key – Betsy kept moving.

I probably speak for many who felt both friendship and mentoring from Betsy. She was a good listener and helped me and many others mature in their community work. Betsy’s positive nature seemed to grow out of a love of life in all its complexity and diversity. Betsy Gledhill passed away September 2, 2012.

Thank you Betsy for making this world a little brighter.
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If you are not already a member, please consider joining. Please use the form on the following page to contribute to GBRW, or donate through our website: www.gbrw.org.

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Two long time supporters Susan Kinsely (left) and Christina Miller (right)
of Ethical Metalsmiths with Carrie Dann in Crescent Valley - 2007

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