

For Immediate Release, August 5, 2020

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Nevada Gold Mines Puts Long Canyon Expansion on Hold

Potential Harm to Wildlife, Cultural Resources Prompts New Review

RENO, Nev.— [Nevada Gold Mines has temporarily suspended](#) plans to expand the Long Canyon Mine in northeast Nevada and says it will conduct hydrologic studies to address concerns that the expansion would dry up nearby springs.

The company's decision Thursday followed months of opposition from environmental, tribal and community groups. The expanded mine would be one of the largest gold mines in the world, with devastating impacts on the Johnson Springs wetlands and groundwater in the driest state in the country.

"The proposed expansion of Long Canyon Mine could potentially be devastating to local ecosystems and communities," said John Hadder, executive director of Great Basin Resource Watch. "We are glad that our interventions have persuaded Nevada Gold Mines to step on the brakes and try to develop a new plan that we hope will not damage the sources of the springs."

In April conservation groups, a Native American tribal nation and a local water rights holder filed [administrative protests](#) of Nevada Gold Mines' new water-rights applications with the Nevada state engineer. The groups said the company's plan to excavate and dewater a massive open pit could prove catastrophic to wildlife, cultural resources and nearby springs, including the Johnson Springs in Goshute Valley and Ralph's Warm Springs in Independence Valley.

"The imperiled fish, mule deer and greater sage grouse that rely on these springs can breathe a sigh of relief," said Scott Lake, Nevada legal advocate at the Center for Biological Diversity. "The water that's flowed for centuries will keep flowing, for now. But this is only a temporary reprieve. We'll stay vigilant on protecting these irreplaceable springs and the animals that depend on them to survive."

In June the Center [sued](#) the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for delaying action on a petition to protect the relict dace, a rare fish which lives only in Johnson Springs, under the Endangered Species Act. A related species, the Independence Valley speckled dace, inhabits Ralph's Warm Springs and is listed as endangered.

Long Canyon Mine was approved in 2015 and has been operational since 2016. Currently the gold mining is stripping away the hillside on the east side of the Pequop Mountains, above Johnson Springs.

“Mining in Nevada is one of the clearest examples of the lack of balance of power between corporations and people,” said Ian Bigley, mining justice organizer with the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada. “We are tentatively optimistic about Nevada Gold Mines’ decision to postpone permitting, though we want to stress moving forward that it is having clean water and public involvement that protects people and ecosystems, not corporate money and research.”

The expansion plan would excavate the existing open pit and proposed underground mine to well below the water table, which would require a massive amount of groundwater pumping to keep the mine workings dry.

Studies show this pumping would completely dry up Johnson Springs and could lower the water table, reducing spring flow at Ralph’s Warm Springs. Destroying these springs would likely violate state and federal laws. Nevada Gold Mines says it plans to conduct new studies and come up with a new mining plan to spare the springs.

The area is important to the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation, which have called this part of Nevada home for millennia.

“The Johnson Springs and Big Springs complex is itself a sacred site of worship that is culturally connected to other significant and recognized cultural areas including the Swamp Cedars Area to the south in Spring Valley,” said Chairman Rupert Steele of the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation. “Protection of the cultural values and ongoing spiritual practices that depend on these springs and wetlands requires protection of the springs’ and wetlands’ water sources as well.”

“Water is life in the Nevada desert,” said Laura Leigh, president of Wild Horse Education. “We also have the last large wild horse herds in the country, and more mining disturbance than any other state. We must remain vigilant. The impacts from projects like these could destroy the opportunity to experience a truly wild, wild horse herd for generations to come.”

“With so many adverse impacts, the proposed Long Canyon Mine expansion will negatively impact Nevada’s communities, wildlife and landscapes for generations to come,” said Brian Beffort, chapter director of Sierra Club’s local Toiyabe Chapter. “This is unacceptable.”

Great Basin Resource Watch is a Nevada based nonprofit that works with communities to protect their land, air, and water from the negative affects of resource extraction.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.7 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

The Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada (PLAN) was founded in 1994 to bring together diverse and potentially competing organizations into one cohesive force for

social and environmental justice in Nevada. Since 1994, our organization has grown from 12 original founding member groups to a current membership of nearly 30 organizations.

The Toiyabe Chapter serves Sierra Club members in all of Nevada, protecting the air, water, and land resources of our state, and providing quality outdoor experiences.

Wild Horse Education is a national nonprofit devoted to stopping abuse on and off the range, and to ensure our wild horses and burros are managed as an integral part of public lands for generations to come.