

Corri A. Feige
Commissioner



Department of
Natural Resources

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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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DNR places conditions on 18 mining-contaminated sites

(Anchorage, AK) – The Department of Natural Resource today gave notice it plans to place conditions on state-owned land at 18 sites to prevent the spread of historic mining contamination, while allowing future mining only under specific protective conditions.

The department gave 30-day notice of its intent to issue “Leaseholder Location Orders” (LLOs) covering potential future mining activity on approximately 4,600 acres of state tide and submerged lands in Southeast Alaska, the Prince William Sound, and Southwest Alaska, said DNR Commissioner Corri Feige. The impacted tide and submerged lands were contaminated by mining or smelting activities mostly on adjacent private and federal uplands.

“Though these sites are now classified for generally allowed uses like hunting, food gathering or recreation, there may still be valid mining claims being worked, as well as minerals that might interest future miners,” Feige said. “Creating LLOs for these lands enables us to put protections in place that will prevent the spread of historic contamination. This will benefit current and future users and will facilitate clean-up efforts overseen by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).”

DNR’s decision to issue the LLOs was inspired by the case of the Klag Bay gold mine, which left contamination after operating on private land on Chichagof Island from 1905 to 1942. The contamination spread to submerged land that became state land in 1959, and is the current site of some small-scale mining, as well as subsistence and recreational activities.

Richard Lessard, section lead for DNR’s Mining, Mineral Property Management, working with Patty Burns, chief of DNR’s Statewide Abatement of Impaired Land (SAIL) section, agree that Klag Bay Mine site is one of many contaminated sites in Alaska where LLOs could be beneficial. Many of the sites contain heavy metals such as lead, mercury or arsenic, that are regulated by DEC.

The LLOs allow DNR to put stipulations into lease agreements requiring miners to take steps to prevent release of the historic contamination, even as they conduct mining activities. LLOs do not impact valid and existing mining claims. However, the LLOs inform existing claim holders of the contamination on their claim sites, enabling them to take appropriate preventative steps. Lessard said issuing the LLOs on these 18 sites will have several benefits, including:

- protecting subsistence and recreational users of the land
- keeping the areas open to mining,
- ensuring miners know the personal health and financial risks of operating on the sites
- letting the state impose site-specific risk-mitigating conditions on future mining
- facilitating coordination of future mining with efforts to clean up historic contamination
- empowering DNR to keep a thorough record of activity on the sites, essential to future clean-up activities
- streamlining coordination between DNR and DEC for remediation and mining activities
- reducing the state's risk of liability and expense for site clean-up
- establishing a model for management and remediation of historically contaminated state tidelands

Feige emphasized that the contamination on the sites were caused by historic, mining practices that are prohibited by modern state laws and regulations, and that would violate contemporary minerals industry practices.

CONTACT: Aleria Knudson, DNR-Mining (907) 269-8648, alera.knudson@alaska.gov and Aaron Timian, DNR-SAIL (907) 419-4480, aaron.timian@alaska.gov

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