

# Digging For The Truth

The Facts Behind the Nez Perce Tribe's  
Opposition to the Stibnite Mine

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# Reclamation Does Not Equal Restoration

*Midas's Promise:* "Restore the water quality, landscape, fisheries and natural habitat" of the Stibnite area.

Reclamation  $\neq$  Restoration

- Reclamation = leaving a mine site in a condition that allows for post-mining land use.
- Restoration = returning a mine site to the natural condition it was in before mining began.

Mida's proposed project will affect 800 acres of currently undisturbed wildlife habitat and result in the deposit of 450 million tons of waste rock and tailings into the headwaters of the East Fork South Fork Salmon River drainage.

Unfortunately, Midas is not planning to "restore" the Stibnite site and in fact, cannot restore the Stibnite site under its proposed project. Evidence suggests that the Stibnite site will be just as contaminated after mining as it is today.

# Liners Used to Store New and Reprocessed Mine Tailings Will Leak and Have Limited Life Spans

*Promise:* “Restoring the site means improving water quality by cleaning up the millions of tons of waste rock and tailings that slowly leach metals and send sediment into nearby ground and surface water.” “Midas Gold [...] proposes to reprocess millions of tons of historic tailings from former mining operations and store the remaining material in an engineered and state-of-the-art lined facility to keep metals out of the watershed.”

**LINERS LEAK:** Midas’s proposal includes the use of liners (geosynthetic and clay liner) for both the 10 million tons of waste rock currently at the site and the more than 450 million tons of new waste rock and tailings its mining operations will generate.

Unfortunately, it is common knowledge within the mining industry that **all** liners leak. Midas is planning to take advantage of the current degraded water quality at the Stibnite site to establish baseline water quality standards for their project. This will save Midas from having to actually improve water quality at the Stibnite site and eliminates the need to address liner leaks.

## Cont...

This may be why Midas and its consultants have, thus far, been unable to show the Tribe how they will comply with current, applicable water quality standards during construction and operation of the mine, and throughout closure.

THE GEOCOMPOSITE LINERS WILL FULLY DEGRADE IN 450 YEARS: What happens when the geocomposite liner fully degrades in 450 years? Will the clay Midas uses fully prevent leaks? Who will be responsible for addressing the discharge from the tailings pile and its impact on water quality in 450 years?

In short, Midas's plan will not "restore," water quality at the Stibnite site. Water treatment will be needed at the site, in perpetuity.

# Evidence Shows Leaks and Spills Occur at Majority of Gold Mines

A 2017 report (*U.S. Gold Mines Spills & Failures Report*) on 27 U.S. gold mine operations in 2013 found that:

- All 27 mines had experienced at least one pipeline spill or other accidental release, such as spills of cyanide solution, mine tailings, diesel fuel, and ore concentrate.
- 20 of the 27 mines failed to capture or control contaminated mine seepage.
- 20 of the 27 mines had water quality impacts to surface and/or groundwater.
  - Of the seven mines where there were no impacts to water quality, six had no perennial streams present in the project area and the groundwater was deep (not the case at Stibnite site).
- Modern environmental laws have not prevented these issues and the legal requirements contained in those laws did not result in a clean site at Stibnite when the last mining company left in the 1990s.

# A Cautionary Tale: The Thompson Creek Mine

The owners of the Thompson Creek Mine, like Midas Gold, thought their plan would ensure no water treatment was needed at the site. They were wrong. The Thompson Creek Mine, once an open-pit molybdenum mine, has serious problems with metal leaching and acid mine drainage (the oxidation of sulfide minerals), that will have to be dealt with in perpetuity. Although acid mine drainage is not a key issue at Stibnite, Midas and the public need to acknowledge that they will have to deal with metal leaching (arsenic and antimony) at the Stibnite site in perpetuity.



# Existing Pollutants and Magnitude of Mine Footprint Will Permanently Alter and Damage River and Land, Not Restore It

*Promise:* “Restoring the site means [...] helping fish migrate to the upper stretches of the river for the first time in 80 years.” “The biggest threat facing the river is inaction.”

The Nez Perce Tribe has a more expansive definition of restoration for the for the East Fork South Fork Salmon River than simple fish passage. The Tribe’s definition includes dramatically reducing the pollutants that the Stibnite site is currently contributing to the River. As we just stated, we don’t think Midas’s plan does this.

In addition, Midas’s plans for the EF/SFSR are dwarfed by the scale of disturbance the proposed mine will create at the Site and its impact on wildlife, fish, water, and cultural resources. The project will leave:

- Two additional, Glory Hole-type pit lakes at the site in perpetuity--larger than the current Glory Hole.
- Store 450 million tons of waste rock/tailings in “facilities” which are drainages and valleys at the project site. It will:
  - Fill in the Fiddle Creek, West End, and Hanger Flats drainages with waste rock.
  - At Hangar Flats it will create a 400 foot tall tailings dam and reroute Meadow Creek over the top.

# Proposed Mine Features and Disturbance at Year Seven of Operations





# New Road Construction will Damage the Landscape and is Not Environmentally Sound

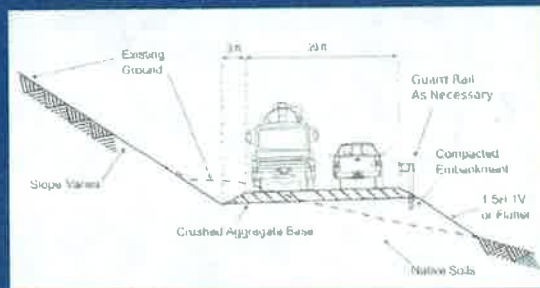
*Promise:* The Burntlog Road “will move traffic away from major waterways, reducing potential interactions with the environment and reducing potential impacts on local residents along the currently available routes.”

26 ft wide (highway width) including shoulders

34 bridges/culverts

Snow removal

Impacts 3 Inventoried Roadless Areas



# Bonding Will Not Cover Midas's "Restoration" Promises

*Promise:* "Before mining begins, we will set aside all the funds necessary to complete the environmental reclamation of the area."

As stated previously, "reclamation" does not equal "restoration." Bonding will not cover the "restoration" promises Midas has made.

Bonding will cover reclamation if Midas, or its successor, abandons the site (as has occurred at Stibnite many times in the past). To paraphrase Mark Twain: This site has a long history of liars standing next to the hole in the ground.

This means that Midas's bonding will not cover unexpected failures, water quality treatment at the site, rerouting the East Fork South Fork Salmon River, reprocessing the historic mine tailings, or revegetating the site.

# There Are Better Alternatives to Fix the Stibnite Site

*Promise:* “Although some groups seem opposed to the Stibnite Gold Project, without it, there is no immediate solution to the ongoing legacy mining impacts.”

The Tribe simply disagrees.

The immediate solution is to clean up the Stibnite site without re-mining it.

The Tribe supports reconsidering the Stibnite site for Superfund designation.

The Tribe believes the community should come together and insist that the Stibnite site be cleaned up.

If Midas believes so deeply in the poetic justice of the mining industry cleaning up the Stibnite site, it should encourage its investor, Barrick, one of the largest gold mining companies in the world, to contribute to the Superfund program.

## Tribe's Other Concerns

Midas only shows you two pictures---the existing site and site after its "restored." They don't show what it will look like with massive disturbance on the landscape. Also, they don't highlight just how different the landscape will look once Hangar Flats, Fiddle Creek, and West End are filled in with waste rock and tailings and the fact that they plan to leave the waste rock and tailing facilities and two additional mining pits on the landscape in perpetuity.

**Moreover, most mines, once opened, expand; expansion is likely given Stibnite's geology.** The Stibnite Gold Mine could go from a large mine, at the initial permitting phase, to a mega-mine involving additional deposits and drainages, with corresponding additional impacts on the environment.

The Tribe believes this is too big a risk to the wildlife and cultural resources within the project area and along the Burntlog Road and to the East Fork South Fork Salmon River.