

Salt Chuck Mine

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Ground Truth Trekking

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Summary

The Salt Chuck Mine operated as copper-palladium-gold-silver mine from around 1916 to 1941. Located on Prince of Wales Island in southeast Alaska, the site has a significant problem with acid mine drainage (/Issues/MetalsMining/AcidMineDrainage.html) and is on the EPA National Superfund priority site list. Pure Nickel Inc, a Canadian-based exploration company, currently holds rights to mining leases in the area and in Summer 2012 began active exploration (http://www.purenickel.com/s/NewsReleases.asp?ReportID=542800).

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SALT CHUCK MILL — Mine and mill site — Get Photo (/photos/salt-chuck-mill/)

Background

The Salt Chuck Mine began life as a copper-silver-gold mine and expanded after later discoveries of platinum and palladium. Under the control of the Alaska Gold and Metals Company from 1916-1941, the mine produced around 300,000 tons of ore.

Acid mine drainage (/Issues/MetalsMining/AcidMineDrainage.html) from the mine has been a problem for the ecology of the area and downstream communities for many years. Contaminants currently found at the mine range from

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PCBs to toxic levels of heavy metals. As a result, the site has been (http://yosemite.epa.gov/r10/cleanup.nsf/7d19cd587dff1eee8825685f007d56b7/f31e3262dcb665d488257a52007aa9e6!OpenDocument) on the EPA National superfund site for many years. In March 2010, the EPA moved this site up (http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/0/3C3C5EEC5545889F852576DB005D7F89) to the “priority” list, which makes federal cleanup funds more accessible. This was, in part, a response to requests by the village of Kasaan (http://www.epa.gov/region10/pdf/sites/salt_chuck_mine/letter_regarding_organized_village_of_kasaan.pdf) to clean up the mine since the downstream area is used for commercial fishing and subsistence harvesting (/Issues/OtherIssues/Subsistence.html) of a variety of species.

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SALT CHUCK TAILINGS — Contaminated tailings on the beach — Get Photo (/photos/salt-chuck-tailings/)

In particular EPA studies of shellfish in the area have found (http://www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/csp/docs/southeast/salt-chuck-mine.pdf) arsenic and vanadium at levels of concern for human health. However, the contaminated tidal areas are under State of Alaska control and there are currently no remediation plans (http://seacc.org/issues/mining/salt-chuck-mine-contaminated-site) for these areas, although cleanup of the upstream areas would presumably help. In 2007 the EPA estimated (http://www.epa.gov/region10/pdf/sites/salt_chuck_mine/engineering_evaluation_cost_analysis_draft_report.pdf) 6.4 MB

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the cost to cleanup the mine at around $5 million, with perpetual annual maintenance (/Issues/OtherIssues/InPerpetuity.html) costs of $53,000.

In 2010, the USFS solicited (https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=a126b7c505f6d079ae42ec1ecc64d1d9&tab cleanup bids under the American Recovery and Investment Act of 2009 and the contract was won by North Wind (http://www.northwind-inc.com/), which is a CIRI corporation. According to the DEC (http://www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/csp/sites/salt-chuck.htm) and North Wind, cleanup was underway (http://commerce.idaho.gov/news/2011/05/north-wind-of-idaho-falls-is-going-strong.aspx) as of summer 2011. The EPA has continued to collect samples and monitor the site through 2013.

Current Status

Pure Nickel Inc. (http://www.purenickel.com/s/Salt_Chuck_Project.asp) conducted exploratory drilling on the site as recently as 2007 (http://www.purenickel.com/s/NewsReleases.asp?ReportID=267258) . In Fall 2011 they announced that permits had been received (http://www.purenickel.com/s/NewsReleases.asp?ReportID=484981) for continued exploration starting later in the year. In addition, there have been rumors (http://www.petroleumnews.com/pntruncate/190854164.shtml) of the presence of rare earth elements (/Issues/MetalsMining/RareEarths.html) at the site. A drilling exploration program began (http://www.purenickel.com/s/NewsReleases.asp?ReportID=542800) in August 2012.

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Further Reading

> EPA page on Salt Chuck Mine and Superfund status (http://yosemite.epa.gov/r10/cleanup.nsf/7d19cd587dff1eee8825685f007d56b7/f31e3262dcb665d488257a52007aa9e6!OpenDocument)

> Alaska Department of Conservation (DEC) "Contaminated Site" page on Salt Chuck Mine (http://www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/csp/sites/salt-chuck.htm)

> Pure Nickel Inc. page on Salt Chuck Mine (http://www.purenickel.com/s/Salt_Chuck_Project.asp)

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