

# San Juan Ridge Taxpayers Association

## Summer News

June 2015  
Volume 4, Issue 2



BBQ benefit September 5  
at North Columbia!  
(see back cover)

Congratulations to Sitabai  
Betts - our newest board  
member!

Calif Dept of Water  
Resources, May 29:  
Zero snowpack

NOAA: Dec-Feb  
warmest ever recorded  
in Calif, 4.4° F  
above 20<sup>th</sup> century avg

Thank you to all our  
volunteers and donors

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## SJRTA asks County to dismiss SJR Mine permit application

*In a letter dated April 23, SJRTA President Sol Henson asked Nevada County Planning Dept. staff to consider dismissing the use permit application for the San Juan Ridge Mine. Text of the letter is below. To date we have not received a reply, but plan to pursue this question with the Planning Dept. SJRTA will be collecting signatures on postcards this summer asking the department to dismiss the application. (See Call for Volunteers article, page 4)*

As of the end of March 2015 it has been one full year since San Juan Mining Corporation unilaterally halted the Baseline Groundwater Monitoring Program (BGMP). There appears to be no sign that the applicant will restart the monitoring program as they refuse to comply with the County's monitoring requirements for groundwater quality. This leads us to believe that the applicant is not serious about the requirements laid forth by the County and the expectations of a community that wishes to have adequate protection in light of past impacts. The SJRTA and the San Juan Ridge community continue to support the content of the BGMP as well as the County requirement of one full year of water quality and well level monitoring in order to provide an adequate environmental review for the proposed project.

Despite the applicant's refusal to collect the required water quality data, the applicant is still collecting well level data through the contractor, Cranmer Engineering. Cranmer was downloading well level data as recently as the week of March 9th, 2015. Does the applicant plan to complete the County

required one full year of supply and water quality monitoring, or are they trying to only fulfill their water supply requirement with the hopes that they will not have to fulfill their water quality requirement? This is a top concern in the San Juan Ridge community.

Additionally it is stated in the BGMP that as a result of Cranmer's water quality and water supply data collection that this data will be shared with individual well owners. To date this obligation has not been satisfactorily met. Residents did receive water quality data that was posted on the county website up until the end of March 2014 however residents have not received any of the data collected from the pressure transducers that were placed in the over 100 wells participating in the Monitoring Program. Well owners on the BGMP are communicating to the SJRTA that they want to see the data that was promised to them. *More importantly, if the monitoring program is not going to continue based on the full requirements laid out by the County then shouldn't the sensors be removed from wells at this time?*

If the applicant has no intention of moving forward with their water quality monitoring obligations as part of the environmental review process then we request that the application be dismissed. *At the very least, shouldn't a timeline be adopted by which the applicant must fulfill their monitoring requirement, based on one continuous baseline year?* At this point our opinion is that they would need to start over again. We would greatly appreciate your response to these questions and concerns.

## Blue Lead Mine approved by Nevada County Board of Supervisors, followed by lawsuit

The Blue Lead Mine was approved on April 28 by the Nevada County Board of Supervisors by a 4 to 0 vote with Hank Weston (District 4) absent. Then on June 3, the newly formed Bear Yuba Watershed Defense Fund filed a lawsuit against Nevada County, asking the court to set aside approval of the mine, for lack of an Environmental Impact Report. (Read more below.)

There are several key differences between the proposed Blue Lead Mine, located off of You Bet Road in Southern Nevada County, and the proposed San Juan Ridge Mine (SJRM), but there are also several similarities. Foremost among these is concern about the water use for these projects—especially during extended periods of drought. This concern was brought to the County in the form of an appeal filed by neighbors of the project. The Blue Lead Mine has been tied up for nearly 2 years as the County, residents, and mine owners have gone back and forth to determine the extent of environmental review to be required for the project. The approval of this project concerns the SJRTA as it may set a precedent for other mining projects in Nevada County including the SJRM.

The final determination for the Blue Lead project was a Negative Declaration. This means the County determined that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was not necessary to determine the extent of impacts of the project. The project proposes to process 70 acres of land using an open pit method for gold extraction from placer gravels similar to the gravels that the SJRM proposes to process in the North Columbia Diggings. It is the opinion of SJRTA and others that the only way to provide maximum protection to all parties is to conduct a full EIR. County Supervisors did require additional hydrology and noise studies in the spring of 2014 with a limited focus to determine any impacts and address the concerns expressed in the appeal. Upon completion of these studies the Blue Lead Mine project was approved.

The lawsuit filed by the Bear Yuba Watershed Defense Fund

on June 3 contends that the County violated the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in not requiring a full EIR for the project. It claims that an EIR is needed to address water quality issues due to the presence of mercury in the legacy mine site, as well as water quantity issues in light of the copious amount of water required by the mining operation.

### **Potential impacts of the Blue Lead Mine include:**

**Groundwater-** the mining operation requires over 600,000 gallons of water a day. The mine operators' plan proposes to use on-site ponds and recycle as much water as possible so as to minimize the amount of water pumped from two on-site wells. Under drought conditions the wells already have shown significant reductions in yield and more wells may be needed. Pump tests revealed that after 72 hours adjacent neighboring wells were not affected. However, the impact that years of pumping these wells will cause is unknown. The proposed project is for 20 years.

**Mercury-** the site is a historical hydraulic mine site similar to the SJRM with known and unknown historic mercury contamination. Mercury was used in the hydraulic mining process and tons of the element were lost to the environment. It remains unknown if the mine owners will be required to clean up the mercury on their land. It is also unknown if disturbing over 70 acres of soil will cause contained mercury to be released to local waterways that include tributaries of the Bear River.

### **Our position**

SJRTA feels that an operation of this scale—where over 70 acres of land will be disturbed by an open pit mine with a large water requirement—should receive more attention than a Negative Declaration. Our position is that this project needs proper environmental review in the form of a full Environmental Impact Report. The studies that were completed are not adequate to address an open pit project of this size.

## SJRTA receives grants from two funders

In September 2014, SJRTA received a \$5000 award from the Rose Foundation's Northern California Environmental Grassroots Fund. The grant is for general support of our work to raise awareness amongst the public and decision-makers of the potential impacts of the proposed re-opening of the San Juan Ridge Mine.

We learned in March that we had received \$4000 from the Patagonia Environmental Grants Program, via their Reno Service

Center. The funds will support our 2015 Outreach Program that includes the work of our Outreach Coordinator, Andrew Collins-Anderson, as well as publishing newsletters, maintaining our website, tabling at events, membership recruitment and associated costs.

We're grateful to these funders for recognizing the importance of our work. Thank you Rose Foundation and Patagonia!

## Knowing a value more precious than gold

I was totally elated! My recipe for Alicia Funk’s Living Wild Manzanita Recipe Contest was selected as a winner. This honor awarded me the opportunity to give \$250 to a community non-profit of my choice. New to the area, I was moved to explore the work of SJRTA and found a cause well worth my contribution.

Before landing in Grass Valley, home for me was in Bethel, Alaska, a region full of small towns and villages and the homeland for the Yup’ik people. In all of my years there, the proposal for and development of a large gold mine, Donlin Gold, located upriver just off the Kuskokwim River, was a constant source of debate, interest and concern. With the potential to be the largest gold mine in the world once in full operation, Donlin Gold was both full of incredible short-term economic possibility and much obvious concern.

How could our short-term comfort driven minds bow down to our true multi-generational perspective to ask the hard questions? What is truly at risk here? What do we love too much

to lose? What is a responsible mine? I saw the need for engaged citizenship and individual and community, not corporate or market driven, science, education and action.

I now see that I have naturally found myself in places rich in gold—both in the earth and in the hearts of the people living with these beautiful lands. Finding SJRTA in this area, I felt grateful that there was already a community-based organization working for decades to mediate the human tendency to let go of what is most precious for that which is most immediate. Thank you to those who have supported this organization over the years. It is my honor to offer this heart-felt contribution.

As I grow closer to these lands, I will offer my prayers, my joy and my engaged action to give back to this precious place of earth that I now call home.

-Leah Walsh

**RENEW OR JOIN THE SJRTA**  
**Help make our voice strong!**

**We Need YOU!**



**2015 San Juan Ridge Taxpayers Membership Application**

- VOTING – Must be a San Juan Ridge resident or landowner (resident or non-resident). Jan 1-Dec 31, 2015.
- NON-VOTING – Not a Ridge resident nor landowner. Jan 1-Dec 31, 2015.

Member 1	Email Address
Member 2	Email Address
Member 3	Email Address
Member 4	Email Address

Mailing Address		
City	State	Zip
Phone		

Membership is \$5 per person per year.  
 Anything above is a donation.

- \$5
- \$10
- \$25
- \$35
- \$50
- \$75
- \$100
- Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to volunteer for:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Tabling	<input type="checkbox"/> Phone Tree
<input type="checkbox"/> Mailing	<input type="checkbox"/> Helping with events
<input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising	
<input type="checkbox"/> Special Skills _____	

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please return to SJRTA, PO Box 421, North San Juan CA 95960  
 info@sjrtaxpayers.org ♦ www.sjrtaxpayers.org  
 SJRTA is a registered 501(c)(3) organization, tax ID #32-0374207  
 ~Thank you for your membership~

Rec \_\_\_\_\_  
 DB \_\_\_\_\_  
 TY \_\_\_\_\_  
 TL \_\_\_\_\_

## San Juan Ridge Taxpayers Association

*Serving the Greater  
San Juan Ridge  
Since 1975*

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### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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*Visit us at:*

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Newsletter editor: Sara Greensfelder

# BBQ benefit September 5 at North Columbia

– save the date! –

SJRTA is gearing up for our annual fundraiser, and this year we invite you to an outdoor BBQ and concert on Saturday, September 5th at the North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center. Save the date because this event and Labor Day weekend mark the 20th anniversary of the San Juan Ridge Mine's dewatering of Ridge wells that occurred in 1995. Join us as we celebrate our efforts so far in preventing the re-opening of the mine and to unite our voices to say "Never Again!"

SJRTA works to protect our water, schools, rivers, streams and local economy, and it is time to celebrate our successes of the past three years. However, the San Juan Ridge Mine application is still active and we remain diligent

in our work to stop this project.

The September 5 benefit will feature barbeque, music, a raffle and perhaps a bit of theater. We are currently searching for auction items for our raffle, so if you have an item or service that you would like to contribute, please contact Andrew Collins-Anderson at andyca25@hotmail.com or by phone at (707) 499-9870. There will be a kids' area this year, so bring the whole family to celebrate our community's strength, resilience and savvy in protecting the Ridge as we sing and dance into what we expect will be a beautiful summer evening. Keep an eye on our Facebook page for updates.

## Call for volunteers

This summer, SJRTA will be at community events and in front of local grocery stores to gather signatures on postcards from local residents. The cards will ask Nevada County to drop the San Juan Ridge Mine's application. (See article on Page 1 for details.) We're looking for volunteers to help us talk to the public and gather signatures. If you enjoy interacting with the public at street fairs, festivals and the like, this is the job for you. To volunteer, contact SJRTA Outreach Coordinator Andrew Collins-

Anderson at andyca25@hotmail.com or by phone at (707) 499-9870.

SJRTA is also looking for a dedicated volunteer or two that can help gather raffle items for our September 5 barbeque fundraiser. The job entails contacting local businesses and gathering items and services for the raffle. If you enjoy talking to local businesses and want to make a difference for the Ridge, please be in touch.



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