

Why we oppose the San Juan Ridge Mine

The San Juan Mining Corporation wants to reopen a historic gold mine in the heart of the San Juan Ridge. Here's why the San Juan Ridge Taxpayers Association (SJRTA) opposes their proposal:

Past operations at the mine drained and contaminated area wells

The mine devastated water supplies when it was last open between 1994 and 1997. In 1995, mining operations at the San Juan Ridge site tapped a high-pressure water-bearing fault line, flooding the mine and depleting groundwater supplies. More than a dozen local wells – some two miles away - went dry, including those of Grizzly Hill School and the North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center. Some wells were contaminated with heavy metals. The school had to rely on bottled water for over a decade, and now maintains a costly treatment plant in order to produce safe drinking water. Many affected homeowners also need to treat their water, at their own expense.

We cannot afford to repeat this catastrophe. Today, more than 300 parcels are located within a one-mile radius of the mine. More than 600 parcels are within a 2-mile radius. Mine operators may promise they will dig new wells if anything goes wrong again. But we know from experience that such wells are more expensive to operate, usually yield less water, and may not meet safe drinking water standards.

The mine would jeopardize local jobs

The mine would threaten water supplies that are essential for local jobs. There are more than 200 jobs at existing businesses within a one-mile radius of the mine site. The five largest employers on the Ridge border the mine, including Grizzly Hill School and the only medical facility on the Ridge. Combined, these five businesses represent about 200 jobs, \$12 million in annual revenue and 150 years of business operations. The Ridge is also home to numerous agricultural businesses that rely on groundwater, including vineyards, family farms and commercial organic farms.

This is not a “jobs vs. the environment” situation, but a situation where a thriving and diverse local economy is threatened by one high-risk mine that promises relatively few short-term jobs. It makes no economic sense, except to the outside speculators who are proposing the mine.

Negative impacts to tourism, outdoor recreation and local economy

The proposed mine is surrounded by public lands, including a State Park, Bureau of Land Management land under cooperative management with local groups, the local public elementary school, and Forest Service land comprising the headwaters of several local streams and creeks that flow into the South and Middle Yuba Rivers.

These lands and waterways are enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of local residents and visitors every year in a variety of activities, including hiking, camping, boating, hunting, fishing and outdoor education. These activities generate millions of dollars in revenue annually and contribute immeasurably to our community's quality of life and economy. All of these benefits are threatened by this risky mine scheme.

Discharge of mine water could harm local wells, waterways and wildlife

As proposed, the mine tunnel will cross at least two more known water-bearing faults. And based on inconclusive data, three more faults could be crossed. If any of these known and possible faults are breached, there could be devastating impacts to the surrounding groundwater resources similar to those experienced in 1995.

At its peak, the proposed mine would pump up to 3.7 million gallons of water out of the ground every day, a quantity that is nearly *one-third* of the total daily groundwater use of all of Nevada County. This water would then be discharged onto the mining site, which encompasses the headwaters of Spring Creek and Shady Creek, both tributaries of the South Yuba River, and Grizzly Creek, a tributary of the Middle Yuba River. Mercury – a highly toxic contaminant – was historically used on the mining site and significant quantities may still be present and could re-enter local waterways via discharged water.

This constant dewatering and discharge of millions of gallons of mine water would threaten the headwaters of these local streams, the wetlands critical to water quality and quantity, and the wildlife that rely on them, including a number of rare, threatened and sensitive species. As happened in the 1990s, excess mine water would scour local streambeds down to bedrock and discharge untreated water directly into the South Yuba River.

Unsafe conditions could endanger miners

We have serious concerns about the safety of the mine being proposed. Instability in the mine tunnel was a primary reason the previous mining operation was shut down. Interception of another water fracture could also pose a major safety concern for mine workers.

Property values are at risk, again

Property values adjacent to the mine declined by as much as 75 percent after the last mine failed. Property owners should not bear this risk again, and the county cannot afford the loss of property tax revenue another disaster would bring.

Other impacts to our rural community

The proposed mine would have numerous other significant impacts. Air, noise and light pollution would adversely affect our quiet, rural community. The transportation of toxic and hazardous materials close to our homes, our businesses and within ¼ mile of our local school presents an unacceptable risk to public health and safety. Finally, diminished water supplies could prevent local firefighting efforts.

Who we are

Founded in 1975, the San Juan Ridge Taxpayers Association (SJRTA) represents hundreds of residents and property and business owners on the San Juan Ridge of Nevada County, California. We advocate for the maintenance of the rural environment and economic, environmental and social well-being of San Juan Ridge. For more information, see: www.sjrtaxpayers.org. Contact us via email at info@sjrtaxpayers.org or by calling (530) 478-1941.