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Locals rally against reopening the San Juan Ridge Mine



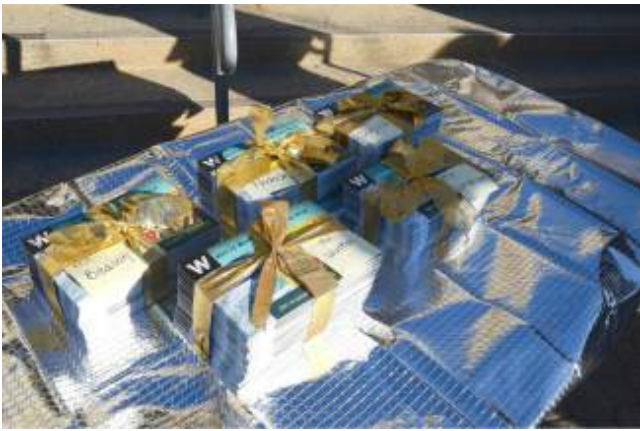
Opponents of the reopening of the San Juan Ridge Mine attended the Rally for Clean Water on the steps of the Rood Center Tuesday morning prior to attending the board of supervisors' meeting. Shown is one of the opponents holding a sign in board chambers protesting the reopening of the mine.



Opponents of the reopening of the San Juan Ridge Mine attended the Rally for Clean Water on the steps of the Rood Center Tuesday morning prior to attending the board of supervisors' meeting. Shown are people looking at a map of the mine.



Opponents of the reopening of the San Juan Ridge Mine attended the Rally for Clean Water on the steps of the Rood Center Tuesday morning prior to attending the board of supervisors' meeting. A bundle of cards filled out by people who oppose reopening the mine were wrapped with ribbons and put together for each supervisor.



Opponents of the reopening of the San Juan Ridge Mine, “Rally for Clean Water” on the steps of the Rood Center, and handed bundles of cards to give to the Nevada County supervisors.



Calab Dardick, executive director of SYRCL, left, and Gary Parson, president of the North San Juan Taxpayers Association, with the bundles of cards to be presented to the board of supervisors as part of the protest against the reopening of the San Juan Ridge Mine.



Standing room only in the Nevada County board of supervisors' chambers Tuesday morning, with people protesting the reopening of the San Juan Ridge Mine.



Opponents of the reopening of the San Juan Ridge Mine attended the Rally for Clean Water on the steps of the Rood Center Tuesday morning prior to attending the board of supervisors' meeting. Some of the opponents hold bundles of cards, filled out by people against the reopening, to give to the supervisors.



Opponents of the reopening of the San Juan Ridge Mine give bundles of cards, filled out by people opposed to the reopening, to Donna Landi, the clerk of the board.

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Carrying signs saying “Don’t Mine Our Water,” about 200 demonstrators staged a peaceful protest Tuesday against a new proposal to reopen the San Juan Ridge Mine.

“It was really bad last time,” said Gary Parsons, president of the San Juan Ridge Taxpayers Association, of the last time the mine was reopened in the mid-1990s, when its operation was called Siskon Gold. “Let’s not do it again.”

The rally, on the steps of the Rood Center in Nevada City, was organized by the SJRTA and the South Yuba River Citizens League.

“Especially at this time of drought, water resources must be protected,” Barbara Getz, citizens league president, told the Nevada County board of supervisors at the public meeting that immediately followed the 8 a.m. rally. “We are paying attention.”

Getz and Kurt Lorenz, vice president of the SJRTA, spoke to the supervisors during the public comment period just before presenting them with 1,300 postcards from residents opposing the reopening of the mine.

“The mine owns private property, but the mine’s right to affect our natural water resources stops at their property line,” Lorenz said. “Unfortunately, that’s not how groundwater works. We cannot allow this mine to reopen.”

Supervisors declined to comment on the issue because the project, which is in the middle of environmental review, was not on Tuesday’s meeting agenda as an item for discussion.

Nevada County has contracted with PMC Consulting, based in Rancho Cordova, to produce a Draft Environmental Impact Report, which will analyze the potential impacts the mine would have on the surrounding environment.

The mine owner, Tim Callaway, did not speak at the meeting, and it was not clear if he were present. The website for his company, San Juan Ridge Mining Corporation, claims that the reopened mine will bring in new jobs, increase tax revenue and stimulate the local economy.

Residents dispute that notion.

“Mr. Callaway claims the mine will create 90 high-paying jobs,” said Sara Greensfelder, media coordinator for the SJRTA.

“That’s what he said last time, according to an article in The Union in the 1990s,” she added. “I found figures dating from the Siskon Gold operation of the same mine on the Mine Safety and Health Administration website.

“The average number of employees per year over the five-year period of Siskon was 38,” Greensfelder said.

The draft EIR is expected to be released for public comment in a few months. During the 45-day public comment period after the release, there will be a public hearing.

But residents on Tuesday didn’t need to wait for an EIR or a public hearing to make their feelings known.

“The real disaster is this chronic de—watering,” said Parsons. “We can’t relent — this is our homes and our lives.”

Parsons said the mining plan calls for the gold to be extracted by pulling out 3.5 million gallons of water a day — or roughly 40 percent of the total water use in all of Nevada County. During the mine’s last incarnation as Siskon Gold, some local wells went dry, he said.

“People here lost their health, their water and their property values,” Parsons said. “It’s a huge risk to them and to the county.”

In September 1995, the mining operation blasted into a water-bearing fault and the mine flooded, Parsons said. Callaway had to ask the state for an amended discharge permit to pull more water out, he said. Eventually Siskon went bankrupt, with any profit from gold extracted overrun by the high cost of discharging the water and running the operation, according to Parsons.

“Repeating the same thing over and over is insane,” he added. “Here he is again — the same owner, the same hole, same method, same water problem, same fault lines — but a new pile of investors.”

According to Parsons, a drought year is a poor time to calculate water use for planning purposes. Water planners and specialists generally require at least seven years of data to determine acceptable water levels, he said.

Steve Baker, a hydrogeologist who has been monitoring wells in the northern Sierra, including the San Juan Ridge, since 2006, said he is noticing groundwater levels dropping.

“Declining water levels, no local management plan and no backup water supply raise homeowners’ risk of losing their only water supply during this year’s worst historic drought in California history,” he said in an email Monday.

“Local groundwater is a critically important resource that needs to be defended at the highest level.”

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