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The Mountain Messenger | Will the gold stay buried in North San Juan?  
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NEVADA CITY, Calif. February 21, 2014 - It's been a while and you may have lost track of efforts to reopen the San Juan Ridge Mine in North Columbia while the tedious work of constructing an Environmental Impact Report has been quietly underway. The San Juan Ridge Taxpayers Association (SJRTA) and the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) are here with a reminder. They have scheduled a rally opposing the reopening.

The morning rally, at 8 AM Tuesday, February 25th on the Rood Center steps, will come just before the Nevada County Board of Supervisors meeting at which some 1,300 signed postcards opposing the reopening will be given to the supes. The two groups want to give voice to some community fears that the mine would, once again, impact local water supplies.

That's right, they're playing the drought card.

In the fall of 1995 the area's aquifer was punctured by mining operations, with disastrous results.

"The mine devastated water supplies when it was last open between 1994 and 1997," the taxpayers association says in a post on its web site. More than a dozen local wells...went dry including those of Grizzly Hill School and the North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center, according to the association. "Some wells were contaminated with heavy metals. The school had to rely on bottled water for over a decade."

"With California in the midst of a historic drought, many are questioning whether the mine is the best use of the county's scarce water," a statement from SYRCL said. "At its peak, it's estimated the mine would pump up to 3.5 million gallons of water out of the ground every day – nearly one-third of the total daily groundwater use of all of Nevada County."

"We learned from the last mine failure that this is a watershed wide issue," SYRCL Board President Barbara Getz said on the organization's web site. "We need to learn from the past and not have a disastrous repeat of what happened in the 1990s."

And mine management plays the jobs card.

"The project will provide a significant and immediate boost to the local economy," the San Juan Mining Corporation claims on its web site, "including, but not limited to, 90 high paying local jobs (\$27.53 median hourly wage), creation of \$4,500,000 in annual payroll, \$2,900,000 annually in local material/fuel purchases, and the generation of \$330,000 per year in secured/unsecured tax revenue.

Additionally, during construction the project will pay \$7,000,000 in labor, goods and services from local vendors supplying and working on the project."

Protection of the environment will be a focus throughout project initiation, operation and closure, the mine operators claim.

The revival attempt, which began in 2012, is a long way from the finish line. "The county has hired an Environmental Impact Report consultant and we're in the process of completing the analysis and preparation of a draft EIR," Nevada County Planning Department senior planner Tod Herman told The Messenger. He expects the draft to go out for public comment within a couple of months.

"The largest issue is ground water impact and our consultants are spending a lot of time trying to get a handle on that," Herman added. The request to reopen the mine has not yet come before the planning commission. "When we release the draft it will start a 45 day public comment period. Somewhere in the middle of that comment period the commission will hold its first hearing."

The San Juan Ridge Mine Company is a transformation of the mine's former owner Siskon Gold, which closed the mine in May, 1966. At that time Siskon's stock was worth 2.3 cents a share and still dropping. San Juan's CEO, Tim Callaway also served as CEO of Siskon.

***Editor's note: The Mountain Messenger, California's oldest weekly newspaper since 1853, is published on Thursdays from Downieville, California.***

**The Mountain Messenger can be purchased for half a buck at the National Hotel (sidewalk), Nevada City Post Office (sidewalk), Nevada City SPD (outside), Nevada City Express Mart (outside) and in front of Safeway, Brunswick area.**

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