



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 1, 2016

Contacts:

Karen Knudsen, Clark Fork Coalition, 406-542-0539

Bonnie Gestring, Earthworks, 406-546-8386

Conservationists Take Legal Action to Protect Wilderness Rivers and Wildlife Threatened by Proposed Montanore Mine in Northwest Montana

Missoula, MT – **A coalition of conservation groups filed suit today to protect wilderness rivers and streams and threatened bull trout from the dewatering effects of the proposed Montanore Mine, a massive copper and silver mine that would excavate for ore under the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness in northwestern Montana. The lawsuit was filed in federal district court in Missoula.**

The Montanore Mine, proposed by Mines Management, Inc. (AMEX: MGN), would mine and process as much as 20,000 tons of ore every day for up to 20 years. The U.S. Forest Service issued a Record of Decision approving the full mine plan on February 12, 2016. But the Montana Department of Environmental Quality issued a separate decision that denied the full mine plan based on its legal directive to protect high quality waters in Montana under the nondegradation provisions in Montana’s Water Quality Act.

“Mining companies have been tinkering with this project for over two decades and they still don’t have it right,” said **Clark Fork Coalition executive director, Karen Knudsen**. “The Forest Service’s approval of mining at the expense of clean, plentiful water and trout habitat isn’t just old thinking, it’s also dangerous and unlawful.”

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Montanore Project, which is based on studies from the mining company’s own consultants, predicts that dewatering the mine tunnels under the Wilderness will deplete flows in twenty-six miles of wilderness rivers and streams that overlie the deposit. The effects are predicted to last for 1,200 to 1,300 years, and would impact the East Fork of the Bull River, Rock Creek, East Fork of Rock Creek, Poorman Creek, Libby Creek and Ramsey Creek.

“The State of Montana has determined that the Montanore project, as proposed, would violate state law to protect water quality and fisheries, and it is unlawful for the Forest Service to ignore state law and approve the project anyway,” said **Bonnie Gestring of Earthworks**.

The lawsuit, filed by Save Our Cabinets, the Clark Fork Coalition, and Earthworks,

challenges the Record of Decision and Final Environmental Impact Statement issued by the Forest Service.

The Cabinet Mountains Wilderness is one of the first ten wilderness areas established in 1964 when the Wilderness Act was first created. It protects the headwaters of several major river systems, provides refuge for threatened fish and wildlife, and its streams have been rated among the top 5% purest water in the lower 48 states. According to the agencies' own documents, all of these critical resources will either be eliminated or severely affected by the Mine.

###

- 1989: Noranda Mineral Corp. (NMC) received an *exploration* permit for the Montanore Project issued by the Montana Department of State Lands.
- 1991: After excavating 14,000 feet of the Libby exploration adit, it *ceased operations in response to water quality violations and a drop in metal prices*.
- 1992: The permitting process continued and it received an operating permit from the State even though the company had ceased exploration activities.
- 1997: Noranda was required to obtain a discharge permit from the State to deal with the ongoing discharges from the mine adit from its previous exploration.
- 2002: *Noranda notified the Forest Service it was relinquishing its permit to operate a mine*, and transferred its claims to a new company, Newhi, which then changed its name to Montanore Minerals Corp. (MMC). By then, many of its other permits had also expired, including the 404 permit from the Army Corps, and the Clean Air Act permit.
- 2004: Mines Management Inc. (MMI), the current permit applicant, applied for an operating permit. MMI and MMC advised the agencies that MMC would be the owner and operator of the Montanore Project.
- 2008: *MMC supplied the State with a revised plan of operations that included major changes to the project. The Forest Service considered it a new plan of operations because the company had relinquished federal approval in 2002.*
- 2009: The Draft Environmental Impact Statement evaluating the potential impacts of the mine was released for public comment.
- 2010: The Environmental Protection Agency opposed the mine plan and proposed changing the location of the tailings impoundment from Little Cherry Creek to Poorman Creek to reduce impacts.
- 2011: The Supplementary Draft Environmental Impact Statement was issued for public comment.
- 2015: The Final Environmental Impact Statement and draft Record of Decision were issued. Conservationists filed a legal challenge under Endangered Species Act - the first challenge of the project by conservation organizations.
- 2016: The Forest Service and Montana Department of Environmental Quality issue final Record of Decision. Conservation coalition files legal challenge against Forest Service ROD.