



Cabinet Mountain Mines



BACKGROUND: The Cabinet Mountains Wilderness provides refuge for native fish and wildlife and its streams flow with some of the purest waters in the lower 48. The Cabinet Mountains also potentially contain significant deposits of copper and silver. For decades, CFC has worked with partner groups and Tribal governments to ensure that two proposed copper/silver mining projects don't put these pristine wilderness waters at risk.

ROCK CREEK MINE

After 35 years of bad permit decisions and subsequent lawsuits, Hecla Mining Co. notified the U.S. Forest Service that it is withdrawing its plans to pursue their Rock Creek Mine. Rock Creek Mine would have tunneled for miles underneath wilderness peaks, alpine lakes, and trout-filled streams to access one of the largest copper/silver deposits in the world. The mine's wastewater discharge would have poured into the Lower Clark Fork River just 30 miles upriver from Idaho's Lake Pend Oreille. Our advocacy work paid off, and this mine is currently no longer threatening the watershed.

MONTANORE MINE

The proposed Montanore Mine in the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness would tunnel beneath pristine forests and streams to access a large silver and copper deposit. The Montanore Project is located outside of the Clark Fork Basin, although some of the underground activity will cross into the Clark Fork watershed. One potential impact of this massive operation is the de-watering of wilderness streams, including critical habitat for threatened bull trout. Hecla Mining Company first plans to expand its underground exploration activities through its existing adit (the Libby Adit) before determining whether to conduct full scale mining. The Forest Service has approved the Libby Exploration Project, but mine operators will still need to obtain a revised discharge permit from Montana DEQ before moving forward. CFC will continue its advocacy aimed at ensuring wilderness waters will not be drained and that water quality and sensitive species are protected.

CFC remains concerned about the potential water quality and quantity impacts posed by the Libby Exploration Project adjacent to the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness. While the Forest Service has approved the adit expansion to allow for exploratory drilling, Hecla Mining will still need to obtain a revised discharge permit from Montana DEQ before moving forward with drilling and exploration. CFC will review and provide comments on the proposed discharge permit to ensure water quality and sensitive species are protected.