



FREEPORT-MCMORAN OPENED AN EMPLOYMENT OFFICE THIS FALL.

MINING UPDATE: MINE ACTIVITY RESUMES IN GRANT COUNTY

by Sally Smith, Director, Responsible Mining Program

The big news is that Freeport-McMoRan Inc. (FMI) plans to hire up to around 570 employees to resume active mining at its **Chino Mines**. Mining is slated to begin in the South Pit Area in February and the concentrator should be on line by May. Tyrone Mine is also increasing production and hiring new employees.

FMI's reopening of Chino and expansion of Tyrone, along with local exploration efforts by other companies, are related directly to the continued high price of copper, which at press time was \$4.20 a pound on the New York Comex. (Prices were under \$3 a pound as recently as last summer.)

Reclamation that involves re-grading, cover-material placement, and re-seeding on the Chino tailings is ongoing and will continue until at least 2013. At that point all older tailings and associated facilities are scheduled to be fully reclaimed and closed, leaving only Tailings Pond 7 in use and possibly even expanded.

The New Mexico Environment Department's **Smelter/Tailings Soil Investigation Unit** has announced a Pre-Feasibility Study Remedial Action Criteria (pre-FS RAC) under the lengthy Administrative Order on Consent (AOC) investigation and remediation process for historic mining waste at Chino. The pre-FS RAC will be used to develop a Feasibility Study (FS) to determine where and how any portions of the area around the smelter and tailings that exceed final RAC numbers might be remediated.

The RAC is based on Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessments, probability analysis, and input from EPA, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and the NM Department of Game and Fish. The pre-FS RAC is a target number selected to focus the FS and may be adjusted with input from ongoing studies, yet FMI already has invoked an Informal Dispute Resolution process questioning the methodology NMED plans to use in selecting the pre-FS RAC. If this does not satisfy FMI, a Formal Dispute Resolution process may be invoked. This was the case with the Hurley Investigative Unit, where the RAC was raised to a less protective number despite public concerns. Although the Dispute Resolution process disallows public participation, please stay tuned as

GRIP may ask you to write letters in support of the NMED-selected Pre-FS RAC.

GRIP participated in the NM Mining and Minerals Division (MMD) hearing on the return to active mining status for the **Little Rock Mine**, adjacent to current Tyrone operations. If all permits are completed—and MMD and NMED make approval determinations—construction may begin early in 2011 on a 40-acre haul road allowing FMI to mine out the long-abandoned Little Rock pit and leach ore onto Tyrone's leach piles. GRIP has filed comments regarding the process and continues to monitor permitting and associated studies.

This fall GRIP toured FMI reclamation of the **Copper Leach stockpile**. This site was left uncovered and has contributed to groundwater pollution since operations at the Little Rock site ceased during the 1970s. This stockpile and a nearby precipitation plant were reclaimed recently by FMI. GRIP contributed to dialogue concerning the partial release of bonding for the completed work.

GRIP is actively reviewing reams of information on the Feasibility Study and Conceptual Models for a Stage 2 Abatement Plan for groundwater that exceeds standards at the now-demolished **Hidalgo Smelter** site west of Hatchita. Water treatment currently consists of pumping clean, fresh water from wells in order to dilute contaminated water from extraction wells. The "treated" water is applied to a greenbelt of about 350 acres of irrigated pasture at a rate of up to 2,237 acre-feet annually, or almost as much water as Silver City uses each year. The company estimates that it will take between 250 and 1000 years to meet groundwater quality standards, which could require a total of approximately two-million acre-feet of groundwater! FMI consultant, Golder Associates, is evaluating possible treatment alternatives and GRIP will follow the process and advocate for efficient use of our precious water resources.

In November, GRIP toured an exploration site near Lone Mountain, off Kirkland Road between Silver City and Santa Clara, where **Copper One** has MMD permits to drill test holes for copper, silver, zinc, and lead deposits. The company has submitted an application to MMD to drill up to 176 additional holes on 54 acres. If permitted, Copper One will be required and bonded to complete reclamation of the sites, drill-holes, and an expected 13.6 acres of new roads. GRIP as well as MMD and Copper One will notify the public about any hearing to discuss this project. At press time, MMD was considering both a hearing and possible "open house" in the latter part of January 2011. Please help us notify people and plan to participate.

NEW BILINGUAL VIVA VERDE GUIDE ON-LINE, PRINT VERSIONS COMING SOON

The latest edition of the *Viva Verde Guide for Southern New Mexico* will be available on line in January. The update, published bilingually and available in "hard copy" later this winter, contains fully updated entries detailing in both Spanish and English our region's green businesses and resources. The on-line version also has a new "search" function to help you find exactly what you seek.

A grant from the U.S. EPA Border 2012 Program has made Viva Verde's directory available for the first time on the Internet in Spanish. According to the U.S. Census, 40 to 50 percent of the population in southern New Mexico speaks a language at home other than English, Spanish being the most widespread. Making green resources available in Spanish and accessible to all residents in the region is an important goal of Viva Verde. Visit us at www.vivaverdenm.com