



AERIAL VIEW TAKEN IN 2008 OF TYRONE MINE REVEGETATION AREA.

MINING UPDATE: A VIEW FROM THE TRENCHES

by Sally Smith, Director, Responsible Mining Program

How much has changed in the realm of local mining since our update last fall? The price of copper futures first went up, peaking at over \$3.32 a pound, inspiring exploration locally in existing mining areas and interest in other places not currently being mined. Copper prices have since declined again, to around \$2.95 in late June. Prices are apparently very dependent on what's happening in China, copper's biggest consumer, as the US resists any rapid recovery and Europe's economy stalls.

Officials at Freeport-McMoRan (FMI) remain cautiously optimistic and are going forward with plans to reopen the Burro Mountains' long-defunct Little Rock Mine as soon as permitting is complete. FMI considers the Little Rock to be a "key element in the viability of Tyrone Mine copper production" and wants Little Rock mining to begin as quickly as possible. But don't hold your breath.

Tyrone Mine has requested a New Mexico Mining and Minerals Division permit revision for the Little Rock, which has been permitted as "on standby." GRIP was granted a hearing by the MMD to review Closure Plans and the Financial Assurance bonding required for reclamation. FMI has said it is using a Mine Plan of Operation developed prior to 1997 that includes a 190-acre open pit, 40-acre haul road to Tyrone Mine (where ore will be leached), a 600-acre permit area, and an estimated 230 acres of disturbance. This hearing could occur within six months, but scheduling will depend on other factors, including review of a 1997 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) by the Bureau of Land Management. GRIP has had concerns about the Mine Plan since its conception, and revision of the Discharge Permit for the New Mexico Environment Department also is in the works. We could be talking molasses here! Tyrone continues to mine, however, with a workforce of about 430. There is expansion in some areas and an increase in production is expected this year and into 2011.

Meanwhile, a plan to reopen FMI's Cobre Mine near Hanover is still in the works. Reopening dates continue to be extended as plans for the mining and leaching of

Hanover Mountain are evaluated. Both the Little Rock and Cobre mines involve parcels of public land for which an EIS is required. GRIP will be following closely the permitting and plans for both projects and will participate in associated hearings.

Rumors concerning the Chino Mine abound. Reopening seems inevitable when talking to FMI — and possibly sooner rather than later. But start date remains undecided.

Reclamation is ongoing at the Chino tailings, visible from Highway 180 south of Hurley. Reclamation also continues on the Tyrone Stockpiles, next to Highway 90. GRIP was involved in Tyrone's most recent reclamation financial release inspection, for the 288-acre stockpile across the highway from the main mine area. Currently, less extensive closure activities are being completed at historic sites at both Cobre and Little Rock. Closure-close-out plans are still not renewed in local FMI mines due to unresolved issues primarily concerning reclamation of areas within and surrounding open pits. GRIP continues in closure dialogue with FMI and various state agencies.

The AOC investigation and remediation of historic waste at Chino is ongoing. This is Year 13, with GRIP involved since the beginning in Community Work Group meetings, decisions, and review of ever-expanding files of documents. The latter are available, in case you're bored this summer, at the Silver City and Bayard public libraries as well as WNMU's Miller Library.

Even though it seems that changes are slow to come in the permitting of local mines, there is always plenty to keep up with!

MEET GCC'S NEW VISTA INTERNS

While serving as an intern at GCC, **April Skye Lee** is also doing coursework at Western New Mexico University in English, Latin American Studies, and Teaching English as a Second Language. Her duties at GRIP include administrative work and promotion of the Gila bio-region among out-of-town visitors and attendees at the annual Gila River Festival. She'd like to see wider dissemination of "personal experiences" related to the Gila in addition to the growing base of scientific knowledge. April was born and spent her early years in Catron County, relocating with her family to Silver City in the seventh grade. Other places she has lived include Australia, New Zealand, Las Cruces, Albuquerque, and Portland, OR.



Gabrielle Martínez is from Reserve, also in Catron County, and is majoring currently in Management Information Systems and minoring in Marketing at WNMU. She is polishing her computer, promotion, and design skills in the Gila Conservation Coalition office mainly on behalf of the Gila River Festival. One of Gabrielle's tasks is to create and produce the promotional poster for this annual event as well as a brochure and other media materials related to this annual festival. Both she and April say they're eager to learn more about the Gila River region.

