

NPL Site Narrative for Blackbird Mine

BLACKBIRD MINE Lemhi County, Idaho

Blackbird Mine is in Lemhi, 21 miles east of Salmon in east-central Idaho. The mine covers approximately 830 acres of private patented mining claims and 10,000 acres of unpatented claims, all within Salmon National Forest.

Blackbird Mine is in the Panther Creek drainage, part of the Salmon River system, and is surrounded by steep rocky slopes. The mine lies on a surface water divide of two tributaries that drain from Panther Creek: Big Deer Creek and Blackbird Creek, which includes several small tributary streams and springs.

Since the late 1800s, various companies have mined cobalt and copper by both shaft and open pit methods. The current owner, the Noranda Mining Co., has not operated the mine since 1982. Mining tunnels and waste rock piles are scattered along approximately 8 miles of Meadow and Blackbird Creeks. The piles and the open pit mine are located at the headwaters of Bucktail Creek, a tributary of Big Deer Creek. The piles range in size from several hundred to 2 million cubic yards. Acid drainage from the tunnels and leaching from waste piles contribute to the poor quality of streams in the area. Many investigations have documented the poor water quality and negative impacts on aquatic life of creeks downstream of the mine. The most recent sampling, conducted in January 1992 by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, documented high levels of arsenic, copper, cobalt, and nickel in downstream surface water and sediments. Copper levels exceeded EPA's Fresh Water Ambient Water Quality Criteria.

The Snake River Sockeye Salmon, designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as an endangered species, and the Snake River spring/summer Chinook Salmon, designated as a threatened species are potentially affected by poor water quality.

In December 1983, the Idaho Attorney General filed a natural resource damage suit under CERCLA Section 107 against Noranda and two previous owners/operators of Blackbird Mine, Howmet Turbine Component Corp. and Hanna Mining Co. The suit alleges damage to State surface waters and ground waters. The suit has not yet been settled.

For more information about the hazardous substances identified in this narrative summary, including general information regarding the effects of exposure to these substances on human health, please see the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) ToxFAQs. ATSDR ToxFAQs can be found on the Internet at [ATSDR - ToxFAQs](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp) (<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp>) or by telephone at 1-888-42-ATSDR or 1-888-422-8737.