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“Don’t Go for Gold,” Conservation Groups Tell B.C. Government

New Flathead Gold Strike Claim Sparks Widespread Concern in B.C. and the U.S.

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Victoria, Vancouver and Fernie, BC— A Vancouver company claims it has discovered new, significant gold deposits in the ecologically-unique Flathead River Valley, prompting B.C. conservation groups to urge the provincial government to refrain from “going for gold.”

“Go for gold at the Olympics, not in the Flathead River Valley,” said Sarah Cox, Flathead Campaign Manager for Sierra Club BC. “The B.C. government must put an immediate stop to gold exploration near a headwaters stream of the Flathead River—and very close to the Waterton-Glacier World Heritage Site.”

Gold drilling by Vancouver’s Max Resources Corp took place recently on Trachyte Ridge above the Flathead River, a spot clearly visible from Glacier National Park just 16 kilometers to the south. Last week, after Max announced it had found significant gold deposits, two U.S. Senators from Montana asked U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar to take action to stop the gold exploration and request that Canada work with them to establish permanent protection for the Flathead.

“We are just as concerned as those in the U.S.,” said Casey Brennan, Southern Rockies Program Manager for Wildsight. “Max Resources is obviously expecting a return on its investment. We’ll be alerting the World Heritage Committee to this latest threat to the transboundary Flathead region and the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park and World Heritage Site.”

In September, following a petition by Sierra Club BC, Wildsight, CPAWS and eight other conservation groups, the World Heritage Committee sent a mission to B.C. to investigate energy and mining proposals in the Flathead and their potential impact on Waterton-Glacier. The mission report has not yet been released.

Notably, Max’s reported gold find is in a “no-coal staking reserve” along the U.S. border established in 2004 by the B.C. government. Cline Mining Corp’s contentious “Lodgepole” proposal for a coal strip mine in the Flathead watershed, 35 kilometers from Glacier, falls outside of the coal reserve. Cline has a second coal mining claim within the reserve that is on hold, pending expiration of the reserve in 2014.

“The B.C. government says the same area where Max is promoting their discovery of promising gold deposits is too politically and environmentally sensitive for coal mining,” said Brennan. “So why is gold exploration permitted in this same area, so close to the World Heritage Site?”

Canada, the U.S., and Mexico signed a memorandum of understanding in November to create a framework for transboundary cooperation in wilderness areas. “The urgent situation in the Flathead should be the first place to implement this important agreement – it is a great opportunity for BC and Canada to garner positive international recognition,” said Chloe O’Loughlin, Executive Director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society–BC (CPAWS). “The Flathead has long been recognized as the missing piece of Waterton–Glacier, and it is a nursery for at-risk species that migrate back and forth across the border.”

“We’re urging the B.C. government to declare an immediate and permanent exploration, mining and energy reserve over the entire valley,” said O’Loughlin.

In addition to this ‘no-development reserve’, Sierra Club BC, Wildsight and CPAWS are calling for a National Park in the south eastern one-third of the Flathead River Valley, and for a Wildlife Management Area in the rest of the valley and adjoining habitat.

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