



Guest Opinion: No to Rosemont mine; our water destiny is tenuous enough

Karilyn Roach SPECIAL TO THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Facing persistent drought and an uncertain future water supply, Arizonans understandably rank water security among their top concerns. Public opinion polls in Arizona and across the West show consistent and overwhelming support for protections of land and water and reveal that such protections are viewed as positive contributors to our public health, economy and quality of life.

In this context, a broad and diverse group of Tucson-based organizations came together to form the Community Water Coalition. Our mission is to provide leadership and guidance toward water policy that sustains healthy ecosystems and quality of life in the lower Santa Cruz watershed.

We envision a future in which Southern Arizona is a model community for sustainable use of water resources, understanding that the long-term health and prosperity of human populations is dependent upon healthy watersheds and ecosystems.

Toward that end, the Community Water Coalition has engaged civic leaders and state lawmakers to express our agreement with the overwhelming majority of Arizonans who believe both environmental protection and economic prosperity can be obtained without trading one for the other. Proposals such as the Rosemont copper mine in the Santa Rita Mountains southeast of Tucson simply do not fit with a sustainable future for Southern Arizona.

Among many problems presented by the proposed Rosemont mine, its potential impact on our water supply ranks foremost. Mines are exempted from the Groundwater Management Act of 1980, and are therefore able to pump water from the aquifer without regulation. In exchange for providing a relatively small number of short-term jobs, Rosemont Copper would have unlimited access to our water supply.

The main water source for Rosemont would be wells in the Green Valley-Sahuarita area, where the water table has already dropped dramatically and subsidence is a serious problem. Proposals and trial programs to replace some of the water the company seeks to pump have not benefited the local aquifer.

Mining would also result in drawdown of the aquifer in areas along Scenic Highway 83 near the proposed mine, where Rosemont recently offered buyouts to residents. Additionally, one model predicts the maximum drawdown of water would occur up to 1,000 years after the end of mining operations, extending effects of the Rosemont mine long into the future.

Equally troubling is the potential impact of the mine on Tucson's water quality. The Rosemont site sits at the headwaters of Davidson Canyon, which flows directly into Cienega Creek upstream from Pantano Wash. This watershed recharges a significant

portion of Tucson's groundwater and is directly threatened by toxic contamination from the mine.

A series of strongly worded letters from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency voiced serious objections to the Rosemont proposal. Among their concerns, the agency cited the potential for toxic pollution and the destruction of rare, low-elevation desert springs and streams in the area.

Rosemont's proposal presents a significant risk to people, wildlife, and our quality of life. Any potential economic benefits that might accrue from the Rosemont mine would likely be overwhelmed by the negative economic impacts through threats to public health and losses to the more sustainable economic engine of ecotourism. Our coalition supports the addition of new jobs in Tucson, but costs and benefits should be carefully weighed to ensure proposals do not result in a negative job equation.

The Santa Rita Mountains greatly contribute to the health and well-being of Southern Arizona and will continue to do so indefinitely if we properly care for them. We should not trade away such a precious resource for a shortsighted proposal like the Rosemont mine.

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