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Controversial Kilgore mine exploration project approved in East Idaho

Conservation groups had sought additional safeguards for the Snake River Aquifer

DUBOIS, IDAHO – On Friday, August 4, 2023, the Federal District Court sided with the Forest Service and Canadian mining company, Excellon Resources, approving the continuation of mine exploration activities in Idaho’s Centennial Mountains that put the wildlife, rural character, and water quality of the area and all those downstream at serious risk. The ruling allows the mining company to proceed with a five-year exploratory drilling project which entails the construction of 10 miles of new roads, clearing 140 drill pads, drilling up to 420 exploration holes in the mountainsides above West Camas Creek and Corral Creek, and all the dust, sedimentation, and noise pollution that comes with operating drill pads 24 hours a day, seven days a week, six months a year, for five years.

In March of 2022, conservation groups filed this lawsuit challenging the U.S. Forest Service’s latest approval of the Kilgore Gold Exploration Project in the Centennial Mountains near the agricultural community of Kilgore in eastern Idaho. The project, about 80 miles north of Idaho Falls on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, was overwhelmingly opposed in over 3,000 comments submitted to the agency last year for its potential to threaten water quality, wildlife, and the way of life for thousands of Idahoans.

If Excellon determines that the underlying geology contains enough gold to make mining profitable in this area, the company has indicated their desire to develop an open-pit, cyanide heap-leach gold mine. This form of mining has been outlawed in neighboring Montana since 1998 for the significant threat it poses to human health and its track record of contaminating adjacent surface water and groundwater with cyanide.

The Kilgore Project is located at the headwaters of Camas Creek, within the Upper Snake River Basin. The streams in this watershed ultimately recharge the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer, which provides drinking water to over 300,000 Idahoans. This water supply is also a key source of irrigation water that local farmers and ranchers depend upon for agricultural purposes.

The conservation groups that filed suit against the Forest Service – Idaho Conservation League (ICL) and the Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC) – were represented in the lawsuit by Advocates for the West and the Western Mining Action Project. These groups successfully
challenged a similar version of this project in 2020, and most recently asked the Forest Service for additional safeguards and monitoring to protect surface and groundwater resources from mine exploration activities.

Speak up for clean water in the headwaters of the Snake River by joining the Clean Kilgore Coalition at [https://www.protectkilgore.org/takeaction](https://www.protectkilgore.org/takeaction).

“Once hardrock mines like these get developed, it's too late,” said GYC’s Deputy Director of Conservation, Kathy Rinaldi. “The mining companies have said the only way mining makes economic sense at Kilgore is to use cyanide heap leach, and these types of mines almost always leak into and contaminate water. With thousands relying on Idaho's water, we can't risk compromising it with cyanide, or compromise the livelihoods of the working families who rely on this resource.”

In the coming days, GYC, ICL, and Advocates for the West will continue to evaluate all available legal and administrative means to prevent a mine in this remarkable corner of Idaho.

“The Centennial Mountains are more valuable as a source of clean water for the Snake River Plain Aquifer than as a target for industrial mining,” said John Robison with the Idaho Conservation League. “If Excellon Resources moves toward additional drilling or open-pit, cyanide heap-leach mining, we will need additional community involvement to push back and protect this critical landscape.”

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ICL works to ensure that mining activities don’t threaten human health, special places, or Idaho’s clean water. ICL scrutinizes proposed new mines, improves those that are acceptable, and fights those that are not in Idaho’s best interests. Visit ICL online at [www.idahoconservation.org](http://www.idahoconservation.org).

GYC is a conservation organization that works with all people to protect the lands, waters, and wildlife of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, now and for future generations. GYC has a long history of reviewing mining projects to protect a vision of a healthy and intact Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, where critical lands, waters, and wildlife are adequately protected. Visit GYC online at [www.greateryellowstone.org](http://www.greateryellowstone.org).