



## **What's the Deal With Tintina Resources and its Proposed Black Butte Mine?**

Montana Trout Unlimited  
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### **Who is Tintina Resources?**

Tintina is a little-known, fairly new Vancouver, Canada, mine exploration company. It has never operated a mine. Four of its six board members are Canadians. The other two board members are Americans who represent large hedge funds that together own more than half the shares in the company. The company's two main front people are Meagher County natives -- its vice president of exploration, and its public relations staffer. Though the company touts its relationship with both as proof it cares about the local environment, neither individual is important enough to be on the board of directors. Tintina's cash and assets, to this point, are fairly limited. It will probably need a large partner to operate a mine. Or, it will sell its interests to an established mining company once it has added value by further characterizing its potential ore reserves, or by obtaining mining permits. In June, an Australian copper mining company was in Montana investigating potential purchase of the Black Butte Mine project.

### **What is Tintina Proposing?**

Tintina proposes to construct a large underground mine primarily for copper on private property near main Sheep Creek and its South Fork, in the upper Smith River drainage. Though it has not submitted specific mine plans to date, conceptual plans the company has been using to sell the project is that its footprint -- tailings (waste material), waste rock, crushing facilities, discharge areas, potential water treatment plant, roads, etc., could take up a considerable amount of the 7,500 private acres it is leasing. Its interests total about 12,000 acres, and include 7,500 acres of private land and the underlying mineral estate, as well as the mining claims on adjoining federal land.

### **Didn't Tintina recently get some sort of mining permit?**

Montana's Department of Environmental Quality approved in January 2014 an expansion of Tintina's existing mine exploration permit. This expansion would allow the company to drive a mile-long "decline" (a tunnel) under the property it is leasing to collect bulk samples to better characterize the ore body and environmental conditions. Two conservation groups sued over the approval, citing inadequate data collection and an illegal discharge of carcinogens (arsenic). Subsequently, Tintina pulled its exploration permit. It says it is now plans on doing additional sampling through surface drilling, and it will skip the expanded exploration permit and instead apply for a full-blown permit to mine. That will require public involvement and more detailed review in an environmental impact statement. In June, Tintina applied to DEQ for permission to drill wells and pump groundwater to determine flow and quality of water they will encounter underground.

### **What are the risks of a mine in this location?**

They are considerable. The company will need to pump huge quantities of groundwater to keep its underground works dry, potentially reducing flows to connected surface flows and wetlands. Geochemistry to date indicates currently confined groundwater could be rich in arsenic. It will have to be discharged somewhere. Much of the copper is found in sulfide ore, which when exposed to air and water can create acid-mine drainage. The result is reduced pH and leaching of metals that are harmful to aquatic life. Once generated, it is impossible to stop, unless it is collected and treated – forever. The mining industry and State of Montana have yet to demonstrate they can deal with acid mine drainage in perpetuity.

### **But Tintina says, not to worry, the Smith River is 17 miles away and therefore can't be harmed.**

Tintina is wrong. If groundwater pumping, or diversion of ground or surface flows for other purposes occur, it could reduce flows in Sheep Creek. At times, Sheep Creek constitutes half the flow of the Smith at Camp Baker. If Sheep Creek is polluted, the pollution can easily reach the Smith. There are many examples in Montana of acid mine drainage and metals harming seemingly distant downstream waters. Trout in the Smith, and as far away as the Missouri River, move into upper Sheep Creek – even above the mine location – seasonally. Radio telemetry data confirms this. If Sheep Creek is harmed, then the Smith and even possibly the Missouri River's trout fishery will be harmed.

### **But Tintina says it will do this mine right and not harm the environment.**

All mining companies say that. The vast majority ends up creating harm, sometimes in the form of pollution and other damage that last centuries. Tintina has not

demonstrated it plans on doing anything different than has occurred at other Montana mines in sulfide ore bodies that have created lasting damage.

**But DEQ's regulators say they can make sure the company doesn't create harm.**

DEQ always says this. And there are many, many contemporary examples of where they didn't, as promised, prevent harm, nor did the agency require adequate bonding from the industry to cover cleanup when mining companies abandoned their operations. The examples of the public getting stuck with cleanup and scarred landscapes are legion at closed modern mines: at Zortman-Landusky near Malta; at the Kendall Mine near Lewistown; and, at the Beal Mountain Mine near Anaconda, among others. Based on the inarguable record, it not improbable that some current operating hard-rock mines, such as the gold mine north of Whitehall and the Montana Resources Mine in Butte, will leave permanent problems with unfunded obligations once they are closed. In fact, some of the same regulators who made mistakes elsewhere are reviewing Tintina's proposals.

**So, should local landowners, anglers and other recreationists worry about Tintina's proposal?**

Absolutely. And it is completely reasonable, given the industry's track record, Tintina's inexperience and DEQ's mixed record protecting the environment, that all of the company's expressions of concern, promises and purported guarantees should be met with severe skepticism.

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