

News Release



BAYKEEPER

*Defending Our Waters—from the
High Sierra to the Golden Gate*

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Baykeeper and State Parks Reach Common Ground On Tackling the Toxic Legacy of Empire Mine

SACRAMENTO – The Deltakeeper Chapter of Baykeeper and the California Department of Parks and Recreation signed a consent decree today to prevent hundred year-old toxic waste at Empire Mine State Historic Park from continuing to pollute nearby waterways. Deltakeeper filed a complaint in federal court in 2004 on the lack of pollution permits and measures to prevent mine contaminants from washing into Little Wolf Creek, a tributary of the Sacramento River.

“The California Gold Rush left us a tragic legacy,” says Deltakeeper Carrie McNeil, DVM. “We appreciate State Parks’ willingness to take action to end Empire’s toxic legacy of contaminating our watershed.”

“We share the plaintiff’s commitment to repair damage caused by historic mining,” said Sierra District Superintendent Hayden Sohm. “We fully intend to correct this tragic legacy, as this department has a reputation for preserving and protecting the resources of this great state.”

This will be the second round of cleanup on Empire Mine being conducted by the state. In the first cleanup, California State Parks removed 46,000 tons of contaminated sediment between 1986 and 1989 that was left there during the Gold Rush.

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The settlement includes requirements that Parks implement measures to prevent contaminated storm water from entering Little Wolf Creek, monitor discharges from the mine, and remediate hazardous mine tailings and sediments at the park.

The Deltakeeper Chapter will continue to work with State Parks to ensure pollution prevention measures provide sufficient protections from storm water drainage off of construction sites and mine tailing piles and that hazardous waste does not continue to present a danger to the environment. With the State Parks' five million dollar 2006-07 budget request, Parks will also tackle the year-round toxic discharge from the Magenta Drain which drains some of the over 300 miles of abandoned mine shafts at the park.

"State Parks came to the table ready to tackle the mine's complicated and historic pollution problems," says Layne Friedrich, plaintiff's attorney from Lawyers for Clean Water. "By reaching this agreement, both parties ensure that state resources will go to clean-up the pollution at the mine and not protracted legal battles."

Tens of thousands of mines, abandoned over time since the late 1800s, dot the foothills of the Gold Country. Located in Grass Valley, the Empire Mine operated for 106 years as one of the area's richest sites--producing 175 tons of gold. Thirty years ago, Parks purchased the 800 acre park and, with it, toxic waste from the century of gold mining. Storm water washed mercury, arsenic, cadmium, lead and other pollutants into area waterways.

"In the Delta, we are warning people from frequently eating fish due to the high mercury levels," says McNeil. "For the sake of our neighbors and wildlife that rely on fish, we cannot afford to ignore the toxic legacy of our abandoned mines. It is my hope that the state will now focus sufficient resources statewide, as they are at Empire Mine, to address this monstrous problem."

Baykeeper's mission is to protect and enhance the water quality of the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuary and its watershed for the benefit of its ecosystems and human communities. The Deltakeeper Chapter carries out this mission in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and its valley tributaries.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION...

Deltakeeper Chapter of Baykeeper
--includes posting of settlement agreement
www.baykeeper.org

California Dept of Conservation Comprehensive Report on Abandoned Mines
DisplayText cannot span more than one line!

Empire State Historic Park official website
http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=499

For energy efficient recreation –
California State Parks on the Internet: <<http://www.parks.ca.gov>>

