



Midas Gold did not harm South Fork, but company can repair it

BY THE SUPPORT STIBNITE COALITION

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For as long as most of us can remember, the East Fork of the South Fork of the Salmon River has been in dire straits. Despite its idyllic surroundings and revered place in our state's history and culture, the fact of the matter is that the mining activities of the early 20th century left lasting damage that cannot and will not improve on its own.

The environmental challenges facing the river are extensive. Water quality has been compromised by millions of tons of World War II era tailings sitting unmitigated in the Meadow Creek Valley and millions more tons of tailings from subsequent operations. Fish habitat, spawning, and migration streams have been disrupted for close to a hundred years.

Salmon can't swim past the Yellow Pine Pit, and sedimentation and reduced oxygen levels stemming from a dam that failed 60 years ago threatens the food chain and further undermines the quality of the habitat.

The conditions are unacceptable to most Idahoans, even if they're all we've ever known. In that sense, American Rivers isn't wrong to list the Salmon as among the most endangered river systems in the nation.

Where they are wrong – and badly so – is in their listing Midas Gold Idaho as a party to the problems facing the river. In fact, if American Rivers cares about improving future of the threatened waterways they highlight rather than simply pointing them out, they should be working with – not against – Midas.

That's because Midas is the only entity actually positioned to fix the problems that have plagued the river and the Stibnite Mining District itself for so long.

Outdated, unregulated mining activities caused the problems in our region. Midas' plan would use modern mining technology and processes alongside sound regulations and oversight to fix the problems of the past and put the river on the path to recovery.

Environmental mitigation is part of a broader plan to develop the Stibnite Mining District for the mining of both gold and antimony – a critical mineral used in sectors ranging from national security to consumer electronics and everything in between.

Their plan would bring serious economic benefit to Idaho – but mining wouldn't even begin until the company first addressed the environmental problems facing the community.

Midas' plan includes extensive recovery efforts aimed at restoring the East Fork of the South Fork of the Salmon River to its former glory. The company would reconnect native salmon to the spawning grounds they lost access to 80 years ago, repair the damage to the dam that has led to decades of sedimentation and water quality degradation, and remove a hundred years' worth of tailings and other legacy mining byproducts.

Midas Gold played no part – zero – in causing the environmental issues we face in our community. But they are currently the only party of any kind, from government to nonprofit to private sector, willing and able to bring to the table the financial resources and technical knowledge needed to restore the river.

Their plan requires no investment from taxpayers and will begin to show dividends immediately upon approval by their federal and local regulatory partners.

American Rivers is attacking Midas Gold not because of the merits of their plan or the purity of their intent. They are attacking Midas Gold because they are a mining company.

Historic mining stemming from the turn of the century was the cause of the problems facing the Salmon River. Modern mining – carried out in close partnership with policy makers, regulators, members of the community, sportsmen, and local leaders – can and should be the solution to these problems.

Few will disagree with the notion that the East Fork of the South Fork of the Salmon River is in need of help. But we disagree heartily with the notion that the very people who are trying to deliver help – Midas Gold – are somehow deserving of either blame or criticism.

We look forward to working with Midas Gold as this plan moves forward, and to the economic and environmental benefits their plan will bring to our community.

(The Support Stibnite Coalition includes Co-Chairs Dan Davis, Willie Sullivan, Terri Klanderud, Gina and Don Schatteman, Kacie and Dave Bracht, Steve Holloway, Gene Tyler, Ron Platt and Robert Lyons.)