

A Major Threat to the St. Mary's River

Atlantic Gold, a gold mining company now active on the Eastern Shore, has an active mine at their Tuoquoy site and also have proposed three additional mining sites (Beaver Dam, Fifteen Mile Stream, and Cochrane Hill). The three proposed sites are in various stages of the environmental approval process and the St. Mary's River Association is particularly concerned with the proposed Cochrane Hill Site.

The mine site is located on Cochrane Hill just southeast of Melrose and a short distance from McKeen's Brook, which one of the most important Atlantic Salmon spawning and nursery tributaries on the East Branch of the River. Much of the drainage from the north side of the Cochrane Hill runs directly into this important tributary. The proposed gold mine site could empty its effluent into this brook, posing a direct threat to trout and salmon through changes in water temperature, pH, and the release of chemicals and heavy metals.

Historic log drives, current clear cutting forestry practices, and other human activity have all negatively impacted the health of the river. The St. Mary's River Association has spent over one million dollars in the last five years to repair the damage caused by poor forestry practices and other human activity. Provided new development such as the mine proposed for Cochrane Hill do not create additional environmental issues, the chances are excellent that we can reverse the impact of these habitat issues.

Atlantic Gold's open pit project would cover approximately 241 hectares on Cochrane Hill, including a massive pit (150 - 170 meters deep and well below sea level in depth). The SMRA believes that the proposed mine will have a negative effect on the river and all species that rely on it. A one hundred and seventy meter deep pit is almost two hundred feet below sea level and the area of the pit is similar to Gillis Lake in the Pinevale Road area.

The St. Mary's River is a Nova Scotia Gem that is blessed with a forest that supports a wide range of flora and fauna, some of it at risk of extinction. Area residents, people from the surrounding communities, and visitors enjoy the river for various outdoor activities including fishing, canoeing, kayaking, bird watching, hiking etc. The river has long been a major tourism contributor to eastern Nova Scotia. These tourist activities bring much needed dollars into the area economy and provided the environment remains healthy, will continue to be a resource for the area long after the proposed mine would close.

It is hard not to support something like a mine that could bring the economic opportunity. But when you consider the relatively short life of the mine (6 -7 years) and the uncertain employment opportunities for local residents versus the potential effect it could have on the river, the environmental cost far outweighs the short term economic benefit.

While it might possible to operate a smaller scale mine or underground mine, we do not believe it is possible to operate a mine of the scale proposed by Atlantic Gold without causing significant environmental damage. The following are some detailed concerns the SMRA has with the proposed mine.

1. Altering the water table in the area and affecting the flow in several of the tributaries and the river itself. With Global warming, summer time drought conditions are worsening and the watershed cannot survive any further reduction in low water flows.
2. Releasing a variety of heavy metals and other materials that will affect the water quality and the flora and fauna that rely on it.
3. Drawing huge (500,000 cubic metres for start-up and 23,000 litres each day of it 6 year operation) amounts of water from the watershed to operate the mine. This is water the aquatic species need to survive, particularly during times of drought.
4. The scale of the actual mine "pit" is too large and will impact the water table, surface run-off, etc.
5. The size of the area that this mine will cover (600 acres) will require a massive tailings pond to control the run-off from peak flood events, the actual pit, and excavation from all the work. With global warming major storm events are becoming more frequent and severe and result in localized flooding. As was seen at other locations where tailing ponds have failed, the volume of water and pollutants released would devastate the surrounding watersheds for decades. The risk of such a failure on the St. Mary's River is river is too great to allow a mine that will only operate for a few years.

The following picture shows what did happen at a Colorado mine site.



6. Over the years there have been a number of underground mines in the area and the resulting release of natural and process pollutants still plague many of these locations. We do not need another one leaching pollutants into the river and its tributaries for years to come.
7. Acid rain has greatly reduced the productivity of the watershed and the soils ability to buffer the leaching of heavy metals into the water is all but gone. Exposing this amount of soil will certainly allow the heavy metals, silts, and other dangerous materials to enter the water course, potentially damaging aquatic life in the watershed for years to come.

We have started a "NOPE" (No Open Pit Excavation) campaign and would ask that you it check out on our website, Facebook page, etc. and sign our petition to show the public opposition to this mine.

<https://www.change.org/p/nope-no-open-pit-excavation-in-st-mary-s>

Thank you!