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OPINION—THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2020

Reset summit on L. Cascade algae blooms

Lake Cascade is headed for another health emergency because of the spread of toxic algae in the lake, but there is a disturbing lack of urgency among government agencies to do anything about it.

Last week the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and Central District Health said tests in the lake found toxic algae levels have increased, but are not yet to the level of a health emergency. It is only a matter of time, however, before the third health warning in as many years is issued, sending a message that Lake Cascade is dangerous place to be.

This should ring alarm bells in the corridors of the variety of agencies that have an interest in the health of the lake, but there is a strange silence. In April, a meeting was planned among the agencies to compare notes about what could be causing the harmful algae blooms and begin talking about solutions. It was billed as a “watershed summit” and had prospects of unprecedented cooperation between local, state and federal officials. But when COVID-19 hit, the meeting was canceled. As of this writing, there is no movement to schedule a new meeting.

This is disturbing, as the need for ideas to turn back the tide of the deadly algae is greater than ever. Fortunately, a citizens group, Friends of Lake Cascade, has stepped in to be the watchdog of the lake’s water quality. Using their own boats and testing equipment as well as volunteer time, the group has kept the public aware of the clear and present danger of harmful algae blooms in the lake.

Exposure to the bacteria in toxic algae can be serious business. Symptoms include rashes, hives, diarrhea, vomiting, coughing, or wheezing. More severe symptoms affecting the liver and nervous system may result from drinking polluted water. Then there is the harm to the economy if the reputation of Lake Cascade changes from a recreational haven to a squalid pool to be avoided.

Only a comprehensive effort by agencies has any hope of finding a cure for what seems to be inevitable annual toxic algae blooms. That is why the watershed summit needs to be convened as soon as possible.

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Viewpoint: Midas Gold takes no responsibility for pollution from past mines

BY Reese Hodges

CEO Laurel Sayer recently announced that Midas Gold Corp. took “a necessary step to protect Midas Gold from being held responsible for alleged water pollution from lands owned and managed by the U.S. Forest Service,” referring to the lawsuit filed by Midas against the U.S. Forest Service on Aug. 18, 2020.

Midas Gold claims that the USFS is responsible for Clean Water Act violations from past mining in the Stibnite Gold Project area, where Midas hopes to extract gold and antimony.

However, the Forest Service does not own national forest lands. We, the people, are the owners, and the Forest Service acts as the administrator. This action indicates that Midas believes that this pollution is the responsibility of the public, not the mining industry that caused it.

If Midas doesn’t want to be responsible for mining pollution on public lands now, will they in the future after dumping their waste in Payette National Forest?

Midas Gold’s proposed project would mostly occur on undisturbed public land, extracting nearly 5 million ounces of gold from three open pits with cyanide leach processes.

It would leave 100 million tons of contaminated mining materials behind a 450-foot high dam in undisturbed Meadow Creek alley, burying critical habitat for Bull Trout and Chinook Salmon. That’s just the tip of the iceberg for impacts considering the additional risks of tailings dam failure, acid mine drainage, and cyanide spills.

Midas claims that their project will “address legacy environmental issues left by previous mining operators”, and often remind people that “actions speak louder than words.” So, here are actions Midas Gold has taken to date:

- Midas lobbied for permission to write their own biological assessment, a critical component of the federal environmental review process.
- Lobbied at the state level to change Idaho code and allow corporate assurances as a financial guarantee for mining cleanup. If Midas goes bankrupt, a corporate guarantee is worthless and leaves taxpayers with the cleanup bill.
- Lobbied to change Idaho code on use of cyanide for processing ore.
- Attempted to dismiss the lawsuit brought by the Nez Perce Tribe for illegally releasing pollutants into the East Fork South Fork Salmon River.
- Filed a lawsuit against the Forest Service in August 2020 for pollution stemming from their own mining claims.
- Promoted a misleading article from The Daily Caller, that falsely claimed “environmentalists are trying to block the cleanup of an abandoned Idaho mine that is leaking arsenic, antimony and other toxins into

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nearby rivers and streams.”

Combined with the recent lawsuit, these actions undermine their efforts to show transparency, goodwill, and that more mining can fix the problems caused by mining.

But what does science show about Midas Gold’s restoration claims?

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Stibnite Gold Project states that the project, as proposed, will adversely affect Endangered Species Act listed Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout and their critical habitat.

Unfortunately for Midas, this contradicts their narrative to “restore the site.” Years of scientific studies show that even with backfilling the Glory Hole and stream restoration, the irreversible damage caused by the project will result in a net loss of suitable habitat for ESA listed fish.

That’s only if everything goes as planned. History has shown that most modern gold mines pollute water with accidental spills of contaminants.

Midas Gold also repeatedly makes the false claim that they are the only entity interested and capable of restoring the upper EFSF Salmon River. The actions of other parties involved show otherwise.

The Nez Perce Tribe already spends nearly \$2.8 million a year on salmon restoration projects in the South Fork Salmon River basin. Government agencies have spent over \$7 million on the restoration of the Stibnite area, including a project to remove 35,000 cubic yards of tailings and restore a 3,200-foot section of lower Meadow Creek.

In the past, Federal agencies and the Nez Perce Tribe indicated that fish passage at the Yellow Pine Pit (Glory Hole), which is on private land, is possible.

The tribe was even approved for funding by the 2007-2009 NPCC Fish and Wildlife Provincial Review for a fish passage project. Once the private land was acquired by Midas Gold, the project could not move forward.

Tribal and federal efforts to restore the Stibnite area ended in 2012 when Midas Gold began mineral exploration.

Midas Gold’s Idaho team has done many positive things in the Valley County community in efforts to build alliances and support. When it comes to the claim that another large scale gold mine can “restore the site,” it’s clear that their actions and plans don’t pan out.

If Midas Gold’s actions are going to speak louder than their words, they need to go back to the drawing board and come up with a much better plan.

(Reese Hodges is a conservation associate with Idaho Rivers United.)

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ELECTION 2020 VALLEY COUNTY PROSECUTOR

Stavynskyy would be fair, do what is right as prosecutor

To the Editor:

Serhiy “Gus” Stavynskyy is the best choice for Valley County prosecutor. He has been a Valley County local for almost eight years. He has been the deputy prosecutor during that time, and now is the chief deputy prosecutor.

He is a strong supporter of the second amendment and the right to life. He is a conservative. He will try to be fair and do what is right in matters dealing with his prosecutorial position.

He is very well acquainted with Valley County. He is a strong family man with a wife and two young children. He and his wife have been very involved with the community in a number of different ways.

He is a graduate of Columbia University. He was a New York City police cadet during the 9/11 tragedy.

I strongly recommend Gus and encourage you to vote for him.

Clifford Scheline, McCall

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U.S. House District 1

Soto would work to unite, not to divide if elected to House

To the Editor:

In looking at the record of Rep. Russ Fulcher in Congress I was distressed to see that he voted no on HR 6201 Families First Coronavirus Response Act which provides relief to those affected by the outbreak. How did that no vote help Idahoans who have lost jobs or are hurting in other ways due to the pandemic?

Rep. Fulcher’s record also shows that he co-sponsored the third fewest bills of all House freshman. Co-sponsoring bills shows a willingness to work with others to advance policy goals. What has Rep. Fulcher been doing for Idaho during his time in Washington D.C.?

Idahoans are being offered an alternative by the candidacy of Rudy Soto. Rudy was born and raised in Nampa. He is a member of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe and proudly served his country as a soldier in the U.S. Army National Guard. He continued his public service as a congressional staffer in Washington, D.C. which makes him familiar with public policy.