December 4, 2019

Dear Editor,

I was recently forwarded a letter that was printed in your newspaper on November 7, 2019, titled; “Barrick’s Record Does Not Bode Well for Stibnite”, authored by Samuel Stoddard, Cascade, Idaho.

My response is that either Mr. Stoddard is ignorant of Barrick’s environmental record worldwide or he is just another agenda-driven hack. The fact that this also was posted in a Blog on the Idaho Conservation League site is about all that is required to understand the agenda.

I began working for Barrick Gold Corporation in 1996 in their construction management group and worked for them for over 10-years on mine construction projects in Peru, Africa, and South America. I lived in Chile for over 5-years and worked on the Pascua-Lama project on both the Chile and Argentina sides of the project. I have worked on and managed large construction projects from South America to the Yukon Territory, Canada and recently retired as construction manager/mine manager on a $1.6 billion copper-gold mine project in British Colombia, Canada.

Stoddard’s claims related to Barrick’s environmental practices at their Pascua-Lama project on the Chile-Argentina border are laughable. It would take a very long letter to respond to all the inaccuracies of his letter, but I always like the “glacier” destruction claims. First, there are NO, NONE, ZERO glaciers in this part of the Andes; there are, however, permanent ice fields that have been shrinking in volume long before any mineral exploration activity began. I know this because Barrick undertook a large program to study the ice fields which included ground penetrating radar mapping and experiments involving constructing snow accumulating fencing. Barrick was aware of the shrinking ice fields and that some were covering parts of one of the orebodies. Barrick spent a lot of time and money experimenting with ways to replace any of the snow packs that would be affected by mining activities.

Barrick was and is well aware of the importance of snow pack to down-drainage agriculture on the Chilean side of the Andes. But international environmental groups took up the charge and falsely accused Barrick of “destroying the glaciers”, that is, ice fields that had been shrinking for decades. Stoddard recommends reading about Barrick’s environmental record on the Internet…we used to laugh at the lies that were posted about Barrick on the Net; but I see many of these lies continue even today.

The “acidic dust” that Stoddard describes is also a joke…there was “acidic dust” in the air long before Barrick ever got involved in the project; in fact, at many areas on the project native sulfur coats the surface of large ground area and is found in the surface rocks. Barrick did not do this. Many steams draining from the high Andes have very poor water quality often with low pH due to the natural environment. The Andes are volcanic in origin and acidic conditions are natural. At the El Indio mine project described below, the primary stream draining from the property was named, Rio Malo, (Bad River) long before any mining activity began.

Because of the lack of an economic method for processing the ore at Pascua-Lama and disputes over labor issues with Argentina, in 2001 Barrick put the project on hold and I was transferred to be the manager of the closure project of the El Indio/Marte gold mines, south of Pascua-Lama.

The El Indio gold mine, also at elevations above 14,000 feet, had been in production for over 25-years by various operators prior to Barrick’s involvement. The mine became uneconomic and Barrick made the decision to close both El Indio and the nearby Marte mine under a Chilean government approved mine closure plan.

I managed the closure/reclamation project for the initial 2-years where Barrick expended over $50-million US dollars in removing all the mine buildings, relocating streams, installing impermeable material in old surface mine open pits to prevent surface melt water from draining into underground workings, removing contaminated soils and tailings, and chemically treating waters flowing from underground workings. This was, at the time, the first mine closure project ever undertaken in South America under a government approved mine closure plan.

This hardly sounds like a corporation with a poor environmental commitment.

Barrick Gold’s involvement with Midas Gold’s Stibnite project should be considered an asset. Barrick has the resources, technical ability and more importantly, the commitment to insure an environmentally sound project is completed at all phases of the Stibnite mine development. The usual yappers and anti-mining types will always be vocal, but on examination their noise should mostly be ignored.

I departed employment with Barrick Gold in the year 2006 and moved back to Idaho. I have no involvement with Midas Gold, Barrick Gold or the Stibnite Project.

Sincerely,

Bert Jeffries

Salmon, Idaho