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Idaho-Maryland Mine Greenhouse Gas Emissions Are Significant

Feb 7, 2023

The Idaho-Maryland Mine Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is inadequate in its assessment of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. A valid threshold for GHG emissions was not set in the EIR.

As stated in the EIR, CEQA Guidelines allow a lead agency to determine its own thresholds for environmental impacts (including GHG emissions), and “explicitly provides that an agency may consider thresholds adopted by other agencies provided that such decision is supported by substantial evidence.”[1]

The Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District has not set thresholds for GHG emissions, so, as lead agency, Nevada County simply applied the 10,000 Ton/year [2] carbon-dioxide-emission threshold chosen by some other air districts for this project. However, the justifications for adopting these thresholds are unique to each air district. These other air districts have prepared detailed GHG inventories to identify and evaluate strategies for achieving the statewide GHG reduction goals within their districts.

Nevada County cannot simply assume that the justifications used by other air districts to adopt their thresholds also apply in Nevada County. Hence, the EIR failed to provide “substantial evidence” required by CEQA by just relying other districts for setting the threshold. In fact, the EIR provided no evidence beyond just copying what other districts used.

But this is doubly wrong because the other air districts originally adopted the 10,000 Ton threshold to achieve the older statewide GHG goal under California Assembly Bill 32, which is no longer consistent with the current statewide GHG reductions goals.[3]

In 2015, the California Supreme Court determined that a project’s GHG emissions should be evaluated based on its effect on California’s efforts to meet its long-term climate goals.[4]

Then, in 2017, the California Air Quality Board Climate Change Scoping Plan stated “Achieving no net additional increase in GHG emissions, resulting in no contribution to GHG impacts, is an appropriate overall objective for new development.”[5]

And in 2018, Governor Brown signed Executive Order 55-18, calling for the state to achieve carbon neutrality as soon as possible and no later than 2045, and to achieve and maintain net-negative emissions thereafter.[6] In view of this, the mine’s 9000 tons/year of emissions for 80 years should be considered significant and unmitigated.

The mine is proposing an 80 year project, and no consideration was given to meeting the state's GHG emission goals. The EIR should have established a net zero threshold for GHG emissions from the proposed project.

For example, in considering current goals, the recent Draft EIR for another mine - the analogous Sargent Ranch Quarry project within the Bay Area Air District uses a net-zero significance threshold for operational GHG emissions.[7]

This EIR should have done the same. The EIR does not explain why the Project should be exempted.

Nevada County Energy Action Plan

The Nevada County Energy Action Plan's (EAP) goal is to reduce the projected annual grid supplied electricity the county will use in 2035 by 51% and the annual natural gas use by 30% through energy efficiency measures. The mine's electricity use is equal to adding the energy use of 5,575 homes in Nevada County. This almost eliminates the results of any energy-saving measures planned by the county.

This project will consume 49,000 Megawatts of electricity, in direct conflict with the County's energy reduction goals.[8] The FEIR states "...although the EAP is not a Qualified GHG Emissions Reduction Plan under CEQA the project was nevertheless determined to be consistent with the EAP." [9] This statement is essentially false. [10]

In fact, the Mine operation is antithetical to the County's Energy Action Plan. The Nevada County Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors should ask the question: Are we serious about the Energy Action Plans? If so, this mine should not be approved.

In conclusion, the EIR for the mine fails to correctly identify a valid threshold for GHG emissions by assuming an outdated 10,000 Ton threshold without any substantial evidence, failing to consider the current State goals, and it would also effectively undo a large part of the goals of the Energy Action Plan.

Under CEQA, this EIR is totally inadequate in addressing the significant impacts of greenhouse gas emissions from Rise Gold's proposed mine.

Thank you,

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[1] FEIR Page 2-115, 2-116, per CEQA 15064.7(c)

[2] "Ton" used herein is Metric Ton Carbon Dioxide Equivalent emissions (MTCO_{2e})

[3] SB-32 California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006

[4] *Center for Biological Diversity v. Department of Fish & Wildlife* (2015) (62 Cal.4th 204), https://ceqaportal.org/ceqacase.cfm?cq_id=1612

[5] California Air Quality Board 2017 Climate Change Scoping Plan, page 101

[6] Executive order 55-18 signed by Governor Edmund Brown September 9, 2018

[7] Santa Clara County, 2022 Sargent Ranch Quarry DEIR 3.8-10

[8] FEIR Appendices, p1945, Appendix M, Dudek, 1.2

[9] FEIR Response to Comments Page 2-753

[10] Nevada County Energy Action Plan, Page 2