

**From:** [Uma Hinman](#)  
**To:** [Ferguson, Tracey](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Open Pit Copper Mine in the headwaters of the Feather River  
**Date:** Monday, March 11, 2024 5:21:40 PM

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FYI

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**From:** THOMAS PELTIER <runciblefish@comcast.net>  
**Sent:** Monday, March 11, 2024 4:14 PM  
**To:** ufr.contact@gmail.com  
**Subject:** Open Pit Copper Mine in the headwaters of the Feather River

An open letter to everyone concerned about the future of the Feather River Watershed

The Plumas County Zoning Administrator will soon face a monumental decision: whether to grant vested rights for the Engels and Superior Mines. But rights to do what? Certainly, an undertaking that would create a pit that could be visible from space would not be granted rights without careful consideration of the effect it could have on communities and on the water supply for millions of Californians. Yet, this is what the Canadian Mining Company, US Copper Corp, is asking the Plumas County Zoning Administrator to approve, vested rights for a project we know nothing about. If vested rights are granted, US Copper Corp, or whoever they sell the rights to, could essentially do whatever they want with the long defunct copper mines. Granting vested rights would also mean that the County would not need to issue a land use permit for the unknown project. Without a land use permit to act on, the County, as lead agency, can avoid having to follow the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), eliminating the need to study the project's impacts before the lead agency grants approval. Fortunately for the residents of Plumas County and the State of California, we have a chance to say "Hold on a minute."

A vested right is the right to continue an existing business operation that doesn't conform to County zoning laws that have been enacted since the operation began. But no one knows what project US Copper is asking for vested rights to "continue?" They aren't saying, and the Plumas County Zoning Administrator isn't asking.

Although US Copper Corp's Vested Rights Petition doesn't identify a project, we believe that their intention is to turn a portion of the Lights Creek watershed into a vast open pit copper mine, the kind that often winds up becoming a Superfund site. But you won't read anything about that in the Vested Rights Petition. Nor will you see any reference to the many environmental studies that would normally be required before the County could issue a land use permit. You will not see any discussion about the increased traffic, or the drying up of streams and springs due to the

dewatering a pit that could be over a thousand feet deep. You won't see any mention of the housing for the mine employees, or about the noise from the blasting, which would eject massive plumes of particulates into the air, or the constant rumbling of the colossal trucks and machinery that would move the blasted rock to the crushing plants. There isn't a word about the greenhouse gas emissions from the huge power plants that will be belching diesel smoke 24 hours a day. You won't see a word about the potential impacts to Tribal cultural resources or the potential impacts from acid mine drainage or hazardous materials spills. Nothing about the risks from tailings ponds, that would be located where streams now flow, or the risks to downstream water users, in the event of a tailings pond failure due to shaking from one of the active earthquake faults in the vicinity. There is nothing at all in US Copper's Vested Rights Petition about what Indian Valley will become if the Vested Rights Petition is granted.

In effect, by granting vested rights, the County would be giving US Copper free reign to do whatever it wants with these mines, though the County would still need to approve a reclamation plan and bond for what will happen when whoever operates the mines ceases mining operations. Certainly, the Regional Water Quality Control Board will place conditions on the mine operation in issuing Waste Discharge Requirements for the mine. Likewise, the mine operator, whoever that may be, would need to enter into a Streambed Alteration Agreement with the Department of Fish and Wildlife for diverting the streams that currently flow through the mine site.

The East Branch of Lights Creek flows past the defunct copper mines, and this stream would be the first, but not the only, water body impacted by an open pit copper mine. Little flow would likely be left in Lights Creek, after dewatering the bedrock that is its source of recharge, and any flow that remains would almost certainly be impacted by contaminants from mine operations.

Lights Creek is tributary to Indian Creek, which is tributary to the Feather River, a crucial water supply for millions of Californians. An open pit copper mine, with its massive tailings ponds and gold and copper processing ponds would be a perpetual threat to downstream water quality, but you won't see one word about that in US Copper Corp's Vested Rights Petition.

Indian Valley is a jewel of Plumas County, and there is no doubt that a vast open pit mine in the headwaters of the valley would forever change this valley. Our communities are making a valiant effort to rebuild after the Dixie Fire destroyed much of the surrounding forest, consuming some communities entirely. Yet the Dixie Fire impacts might seem small, when compared to the impacts from an open pit copper mine. Trees will grow and communities will be rebuilt, but an open pit mine will remain a permanent scar on the landscape.

Children growing up in Indian Valley will never know this valley as we do now, instead they would grow up in an industrial zone with heavy traffic, noise, dust, and impaired water quality. The mine would operate for perhaps a couple of decades, potentially bringing prosperity during that brief period, but leaving a blighted valley, with the looming threat of tailings pond failures, and a legacy of toxic wastes leaching into the

water supply for millions of Californians. The threat would persist for generations to come.

If US Copper had an actual plan for the project, they could apply for a Special Use Permit, and following a full CEQA review and other legal requirements, could eventually begin mining copper and gold at these long-shuttered mines. But if the County decides that it doesn't need to know what US Copper plans to do, or what the outcomes might be, and approves the Vested Rights Petition, they will be approving a project they know nothing about. If a Superfund-scale disaster results, it will be too late to say, Well, there was nothing about that in the Vested Rights Petition.

We citizens have this brief opportunity to make our voices heard and ask for accountability from the Plumas County Zoning Administrator. We urge all those concerned about the future of Indian Valley and the Feather River to submit comments for the ongoing vested rights hearing by emailing Plumas County's Planning Director, Tracey Ferguson at [TraceyFerguson@countyofplumas.com](mailto:TraceyFerguson@countyofplumas.com). For more details regarding the hearing, please see <https://ca-plumascounty2.civicplus.com/2180/Zoning-Administrator>. Let them know that it's a bad idea to approve vested rights for a project they, and the citizens of Plumas County, know nothing about.

Sincerely,

Tom Peltier

Greenville, California