In May, Amy Crook joined the Center as its Alaska representative. Amy has been working in the field of water quality protection for over twenty years. She has a B.S. in Natural Resource Management from the University of Michigan and a M.S. in Fishery Resource Management from Oregon State University.

Amy left the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Water Quality Program after 13 years as the program coordinator of the Industrial Operations Section. She has extensive experience in permitting and oversight of Alaskan industrial facilities, reviewing environmental impact statements, environmental toxicology and working with communities, public interest groups and industry on controversial and complex development projects. Previous to working with DEC, Amy was a scientist for the National Marine Fisheries Service on a project studying ocean survival of salmon, and as a consultant to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in St. John, Newfoundland, Canada on a stream restoration project.

Amy’s focus with CSP will be broader than mining. Because her expertise is more general and not focused so heavily on mining as the other staff members, and because the need for technical support on environmental issues is so broad in Alaska, Amy will be providing general technical support on water and air quality issues to Alaska environmental groups.

Since her start with CSP Amy has been working on a variety of projects around Alaska. She has been assisting the Northern Alaska Environmental Center (NAEC) and Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC) with their reviews of several mining projects around Alaska; Greens Creek, Red Dog, Kensington, Fort Knox, Tulsequah Chief and other mines. Amy has been assisting the new mining and water quality staff at the Northern Alaska Environmental Center in Fairbanks and the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council in Juneau to get up to speed on mining projects around the state, State and Federal environmental laws, agency introductions and general support.

Amy is a member of the Alaska Conservation Alliance’s Air and Water Quality working group and provides technical support for the member groups. She is also serving on the Industrial Permitting, and Cruise Ship Pollution Work Group of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation Water Quality Program. Amy has also been acting as a liaison between public interest groups and several state and federal agencies to improve communication with, and access to, decision makers.
The main issue at stake is whether the existing reclamation bond, totaling approximately $60 million, will be adequate to reclaim the property. The state asked the bankruptcy court for an additional $8 million to complete its proposed reclamation, and the Fort Belknap Tribes would like additional funding in order to adequately address environmental standards and aesthetic and cultural issues important to its residents.

Troy Mine

The Troy Mine is an underground copper-silver mine located near Noxon, MT in the Cabinet Mountains Range. The mine, owned until recently by ASARCO, is now temporarily closed, and along with the proposed nearby controversial Rock Creek Project was recently purchased by Sterling Mining Co. Sterling has proposed re-opening the Troy Mine and going ahead with development of the Rock Creek Mine, which would be located underneath the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness area.

CSP recently completed an evaluation on behalf of the Cabinet Resource Group of the Montana Department of Environmental Quality’s five-year review of the Troy Mine bond. The DEQ recommended that the bond for reclamation of the mine tailings pond be increased from the existing amount of $2.8 million to a new amount of $10.0 million. The increase was due to new procedures undertaken by DEQ in response to the bankruptcy of Pegasus Gold Co., that included calculation of the bond amount as if the agency were performing the reclamation rather than the company.

Based on the Hardrock Reclamation Bonding Practice study recently completed by CSP, the new bond amount by DEQ was found to be consistent with recommended regulatory practices. However, the Center has recommended some additional bonding to address ongoing seepage and stability issues not addressed in the revised bond.
NEW MEXICO

by Jim Kuipers

The Questa Molybdenum and Chino-Tyrone mines are two of the major mines in the country for which a reclamation and closure plan and bond amount have yet to be developed. The State of New Mexico’s Environment Department and Minerals and Mines Division are in the process of using the 1993 New Mexico Mine Reclamation Act and other state statutes to establish reclamation plans and bonds for those and other mines in the State.

Questa is a molybdenum mine owned by Molycorp located in the Northern part of the state. The open-pit and underground Questa mine has been the subject of ongoing controversy with respect to acid mine drainage and impacts to the Red River. There are large angle-of-repose waste rock dumps that sit above the Red River that appear to be leaching contaminants into the river. The Red River has also been impacted in the past by breaks and spills in the tailings transport lines from the mine to the tailings pond.

Reclamation planning for the waste rock dumps, the tailings ponds, and the open pit is now underway. One of the key issues yet to be established is whether there is a hydrologic connection between the contamination in these facilities, which is documented, and the Red River.

The Chino-Tyrone mines are large, open pit copper mines operated by the Phelps Dodge Mining Company in Grant County, near Silver City, New Mexico. In addition to the mines there is a large copper smelter at Hurley, New Mexico, also in Grant County. Sulfate plumes, and possible metal contamination of groundwater are issues at this complex.

CSP, together with the Mineral Policy Center, met with various public interest group in New Mexico this past summer to discuss mining issues in the state. The Center also met with the State agencies responsible for mine reclamation and bonding, and discussed their plans for establishing reclamation and closure bonds for the various mines.

In September, CSP conducted a three-day workshop on reclamation and closure and bonding practices, presenting the results of the previously mentioned Hardrock Mining Reclamation and Bonding Practices study, as well as considering the issue in more detail for both the Questa and Chino-Tyrone mines.

The Center recently agreed to provide technical assistance to Amigos Bravos, a local environmental group, in their on-going efforts to address the environmental impacts of the Questa Mine.

CSP is also assisting Gila River Information Project in their efforts on the Chino-Tyrone mines.

From the Executive Director

CSP is pleased to announce the release of a major study titled Hardrock Reclamation Bonding Practices in the Western United States, conducted for the National Wildlife Federation. The study is the culmination of an effort that was begun in late 1998 to comprehensively and critically address the issue of reclamation bonding practice.

The four part study addresses bonding features, mechanisms, costs, and practice. It contains each individual state’s major mines, disturbed acres and bond amounts; each state’s significant reclamation and closure bonding statutes; and 18 individual case studies of reclamation and closure plans and bond amounts for various selected mine sites. In addition, the study contains a recommended regulatory model for reclamation and closure bonding statutes, and a critique of each individual state’s existing statutes.

The study includes all the western U.S. states (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, as well as information on the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service.

The study emphasizes comparison of different state statutes, practices, and costing methods for reclamation bond amounts. It is intended to be both a technical manual useful to the scientific and regulatory community, as well as a tool useful to public interest groups concerned with mining issues.

One of the key issues the study focuses on is that of mining related water quality impacts. The study shows that typical reclamation and closure costs can increase from an average of approximately $5,000 per acre to $20,000 - $50,000 per acre, or more, when acid mine drainage or similar problems affect water quality.

Given that these water quality impacts are frequently not discovered until after mine permitting and bond levels are set, the study recommends that state and federal agencies more diligently assess the potential for acid mine drainage, and address the necessary mitigation in the reclamation plan and bond amount.

Copies of the study can be obtained by contacting the Center, and will be posted in *.pdf file format on our website, which will be established in mid-2000.

Dave Chambers is the Executive Director of CSP
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