

Community Update

Kennecott Mines and Mill Town Site

CERCLA RI Activities

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

August 2021



SITE BACKGROUND

The Kennecott Mines and Mill Town Site (the Site) is located in the Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark (KNHL) within the 13.2 million-acre Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST), approximately 3.5 miles north of the town of McCarthy. The Mill Town portion of the Site is located within the Mill Site Unit of the Kennecott Subdivision. The Mill Town is comprised of over 100 historic structures, including former operational structures such as the Mill Building, Leaching Plant, Power Plant, and numerous housing and support structures. Currently much of the Mill Town is on lands administered by the National Park Service (NPS) and is a popular tourist destination.

The Kennecott mines, mill, and related facilities were developed and operated by the Kennecott Copper Corporation between 1906 and 1938. The Mill Building, and later the Leaching Plant, received and concentrated ore from the nearby mines. Today, the Mill Town primarily consists of historic buildings and other structures that were used to support the copper ore processing operations. Known types of wastes generated as a result of copper ore processing operations include lead- and arsenic-based paint, mill tailings, blasting caps, boiler ash, asbestos containing material (ACM), and petroleum-related wastes from spills.

In 2015, NPS initiated a Preliminary Assessment (PA) in response to a potential release of hazardous substances to the environment from historical operations. The PA was based on review of historical reports and documentation as well as a site reconnaissance. Based upon the results of the PA, NPS determined that a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS), pursuant to the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), was necessary to fully characterize the nature and extent of contamination that may pose a threat to the public and/or the environment and to evaluate alternatives for a permanent remedy.

PHASE I REMEDIAL INVESTIGATION TO BEGIN ON AUGUST 10, 2021

During the month of August 2021, NPS will be initiating Phase I of the RI for the Site. During the investigation, NPS contractors will be collecting environmental samples from various locations on federal lands in the Mill Town portion of the Site as follows:



- Air samples and soil samples to assess outdoor air quality as it relates to fugitive dust emissions.
- Soil samples to assess the nature and extent of lead- and arsenic- based paint impacts.
- Soil samples to estimate metal concentrations and assess the horizontal extent of mill tailings and ore/ore concentrates.
- Soil samples to assess the horizontal extent of blasting cap disposal areas and related contaminants.
- Surface water and sediment samples from National Creek to assess Site-related contaminant migration.



Phase I RI field investigation activities are being planned and implemented in close coordination with Park staff to protect public safety. Mill Town areas and buildings currently open to the public will remain open during investigation activities; however, an exclusion zone will be established around active work areas using safety cones, stakes, and/or caution tape. Residents and visitors are asked to respect the boundaries that are established for their safety and the safety of the sampling crew. Field work is expected to take approximately three weeks, with field personnel performing various tasks during daylight hours on both weekdays and weekends.

NEXT STEPS

Following the Phase I field work, a Phase I RI Technical Memorandum will be prepared to include the following:

- A summary of findings
- Estimated extent of potential contamination
- Summary of analytical results
- Compilation of field data, analytical reports, data validation reports, and statistical evaluations
- Recommendation and data gaps for future phases of the RI



COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Community involvement is an important part of the NPS CERCLA process. Information repositories have been established in the three locations identified below and house copies of the Site Administrative Record File. CERCLA administrative record files consist of those documents that will form the basis for the selection of a site's cleanup action. Electronic copies of the documents currently in the Administrative Record File, including the Kennecott Community Involvement Plan, are available on-line on the Park's website ([Site webpage link¹](#)). Paper copies are available at the information repositories; call for an appointment to review the records in person. The repositories will be updated periodically.

KENNECOTT INFORMATION REPOSITORIES

NPS Alaska Regional Office

240 W 5th Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99501
Contact: Sarah Venator
Phone: (907) 644-3573

Kennecott Visitor Center

Blackburn School
Kennecott, AK 99588
Phone: (907) 205-7106

WRST Park Headquarters

Mile 106.8 Richardson Highway
Copper Center, AK 99573-0439
Contact: Mark E. Miller
Phone: (907) 302-1373

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you have questions concerning the information contained in this Community Update, please contact Sarah Venator, NPS Federal Government Lead, via email at sarah_venator@nps.gov, or Mark Miller, NPS Park Contact, via email at memiller@nps.gov.

¹ <https://www.nps.gov/wrst/learn/management/kennecott-mines-and-mill-town-site-environmental-investigation-project.htm>