

# Environmental economics versus economic boon of mining

**A**TORONTO company, Geddes Resources, plans to lop off the top of remote Windy Craggy Mountain to get at the copper buried within.

Twenty years ago, British Columbians would have cheered this project because of its substantial economic benefits, and then forgotten about it. Isolated in the mountainous northwest corner of the province, Windy Craggy might as well have been on the moon.

But today, the mountain's proximity to the wild Tatchsheni and Alsek rivers has made this an environmental story — while the economic benefits of mining are virtually ignored.

Various U.S. federal and Alaskan agencies, worried about the effect on the small fishery and the wilderness values, have

weighed in against the mine, and the Canadian environment department says the company's first stage study is unacceptable.

Environmental groups and rafting tour companies are massing against it. At the recent public meeting in Vancouver, one of these opponents boasted of 32 organizations across North America gearing up to stop Windy Craggy. Compared to this, he suggested, Carmanah will look like a pillow fight.

But Windy Craggy is more than an environmental story. Tuesday's column will deal with those issues, but first, here are some points to consider.

Geddes Resources calls Windy Craggy a "world-scale" copper deposit, which means it's big. It would produce about 120,000



tonnes of copper each year, or about one per cent of world production. It would be somewhat smaller than the Highland Valley operation in the Interior and about twice as large as Island Copper on Vancouver Island. If you live in a tent and never

drive a car then you'll be bored by all that copper. But most of us can't get through the day without it. The wiring in our houses is usually copper, and every electrical motor relies on copper.

Copper has outlasted predictions that it would be replaced either by new technology or other metals. Geddes president Gerald Harper says worldwide demand is growing at the rate of about 1.5 per cent a year.

Within B.C., copper mines are dwindling. Brenda closed Friday, Bell is near the end of its life, Island Copper is expected to run out before the end of the decade. New sources have to be found.

Geddes estimates it will employ 655 people over a mine life of at least 20 years, spend close to

\$700 million on wages and supplies and pay \$200 million in various taxes over the first 10 years.

This kind of project has been a mainstay of B.C.'s economy from the earliest days of colonial settlement. It pays the bills. That is even more the case for the Yukon, whose residents, suppliers and contractors would benefit from this project.

Getting those benefits to flow, however, won't be a snap for Geddes. The major challenge lies in safely disposing of an enormous amount of waste rock and tailings in an environment gripped by glaciers.

If the mine wins final approval (and it has many stages to go through), the company will have to build a bridge over the Tatchsheni, a bridge that would be

visible to rafting clients who have paid substantial fees for a wilderness experience.

That would make the trip harder to sell, cutting into the rafting companies' business and reducing the economic benefits from tourism.

The bulk of this business appears to be American: U.S.-based rafting companies serving well-to-do Americans with trips (costing about \$2,000 per person) starting out from Haines, Alaska.

So you can see what the economics boil down to: A mine that benefits Canadians versus a rafting business that profits Americans.

Alas, it's not that simple. More on Tuesday.

Brenda mine closes, B9

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