

Windy Craggy
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RESOURCES

'Higher purpose people' threaten our heritage

The people who built this province — the prospectors, miners, ranchers, loggers and their families — came here to build a better life, and they succeeded.

Against formidable odds they created one of the wealthiest jurisdictions anywhere. Thanks to them, the average British Columbian today enjoys a standard of living surpassed by few others in the world.

The resources that attracted these settlers led to the construction of roads and the development of many communities throughout the province, most of which still exist today. But today, those communities, their heritage and the families who live in them are threatened.

National and international environmental groups would have you believe that our heritage is not what we do with resources, but rather what we don't do with them.

These "higher-purpose people" would rather see our resources set aside, forever withdrawn from productivity, than see them used to preserve the integrity and value of our highly prized social and economic systems.

Their philosophy represents the real threat to our heritage and their efforts to shape government policy have hit a responsive chord with the current provincial government.

The mining industry has been re-

IN MY OPINION

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garded as British Columbia's second most-important resource industry since modern mining began about 140 years ago. Until the 1980s, prospectors in B.C. had confidence that if they were lucky enough to dis-

cover a significant mineral prospect, legislation was in place to ensure its responsible development into production.

The indispensability of access for exploration and production was not questioned.

Now the climate is different. The mining industry is highly over-regulated by ever-changing legislation, access to deposits is grudgingly permitted and never assured, and mineral tenures are tenuous.

B.C. prospectors and mining companies are justifiably reluctant to risk millions in exploration and development expenditures with the threat of land alienation and expropriation hanging over their heads.

Mineral resources are the rarest and most elusive of our natural resources. Since the 1850s, less than 0.08 per cent of the province's land base has been disturbed — the equivalent of less than one-quarter of the Greater Vancouver regional district. Most of this has been reclaimed.

Historically, an average of 15 to 20 years is required for successful mineral discoveries to reach production, and the odds of a viable mine resulting are far less than one in 1,000. In the past six years, almost two mines have closed for every one opening.

Those currently preparing for production such as Kemess, Huckleberry and Mount Polley were all discovered

about 30 years ago.

All but forgotten by the general public, but not the mining industry, is the enormous loss of investor confidence when the provincial government expropriated the world-class Windy Craggy copper-gold deposit and its under-explored world-class mineral belt in 1993 to create Tatshenshini-Alsek Wilderness Park.

That decision came 35 years after the discovery of the deposit and the expenditure of \$50 million. This monumentally devastating decision, based on misleading and information and still under review by the Ombudsman after three years, begs for reasonable modification if land-use decisions are ever to be respected in B.C.

Today, exploration expenditures are just 50 per cent of what they were in the late 1980s, and most of that is being spent on known deposits rather than on finding new ones.

Of the \$1.5 billion raised on the Vancouver Stock Exchange in 1996 for the mineral sector, less than one-twentieth was destined to be spent in B.C. The balance — more than \$1.4 billion — went to create jobs, generate tax revenues and develop the future heritage of other parts of Canada and the rest of the world.

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