

# The price for building a new mine will be Fish Lake

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Fish Lake is one of the most productive bodies of water in the trout-rich Cariboo. On a typical day, your average know-nothing can throw in a line and catch 20 rainbows. A skilled angler can take 80 to 100 a day. Heck, stay up all night and you can get enough trout to sink your boat.

But this little lake, which lies south of Alexis Creek and just East of Taseko Lake, has never drawn a crowd. Last year 94 people visited the forest service campground on the lake; the year before only 38 vehicles pulled in. That's for the whole year.

There are two reasons Fish Lake isn't more popular. Number one, it's remote and you have to like driving rough roads to get there. Number two, while the trout population is large, the fish themselves are relatively small. Some might even call them tiny, with a typical trout running about 25 cm (10 inches).

Fish Lake's days of anonymity are over, however, for it has become the focal point of an environmental debate.

Just below Fish Lake's outlet lies a massive copper/gold deposit. There are enough valuable minerals in the rocks there to support one of the biggest open pit mines in North America. We're talking about a mine that will create over 1,000 jobs, that will gener-



ate \$82 million in tax revenues per year and that will cost \$460 million to build.

Taseko Mines Ltd., of Vancouver has already spent \$42 million in the past few years proving up what's now known as the Prosperity Gold Copper Project at Fish Lake.

Taseko president Bob Dickinson is proud of the big numbers he can put up when talking of the project — but he's also refreshingly open about what will happen to Fish Lake if the mine goes ahead.

"It's unfortunate," he says. "The lake would have to go."

To safely mine the ore deposit, he said, Fish Lake will have to be slowly drained. It's bed will then be used to store the millions of tons of waste rock that will be generated over the mine's 32-year life span.

There was a time in B.C., not all that long ago when a company with a huge prospect like this would have simply bulldozed ahead, trashing the environment and getting out when the gold was gone.

Dickinson said his company is directed by a group of young people who reflect the new values of their generation. They want the mine to go — but they also want to do the right thing by the environment.

He says Taseko is spending a lot of time and money studying the fisheries values of the region and hopes to be able to propose some alternatives that will be acceptable to sports anglers and native subsistence fishers in the area.

"There are some pretty exciting possibilities in other lakes," he says.

Taseko has proposed two general strategies; one would concentrate on developing the fisheries potential of a single isolated watershed in the region, like Nunstsi Lakes. The other would be to work on a collection of lakes, stocking them and funding habitat improvement work.

Dickinson adds Taseko would be fully bonded for the Fish Lake project, and would do what it could to restore both the landscape and the fishery once the mine was finished.

"Please note that the compensation ideas are just that because Taseko plans to work with all stakeholders over the months ahead to build the most worthwhile compensation plan for the region," he says.

Maurice Lirette, a provincial fisheries biologist in the region, is one guy who's going to take a lot of convincing that compensation is appropriate.

He says his ministry is opposed to the mine because of the potential value of Fish Lake.

Lirette admits it's hard to stand in the way of a massive mine when just a handful of anglers are using the resource. But he's taking a longer view of things. He's thinking about demographics, population growth and the widespread environmental degradation that has already destroyed so many good fishing lakes in the Lower Mainland.

In the years ahead, he says, Fish Lake could become an important destination. A place with wild trout in abundance.

"You're dealing with existing use versus potential use in 50 or 100 years from now," he says.

"You can easily compensate for the angler days lost by stocking another lake. But that doesn't create any new lakes, because we can stock for virtually nothing ourselves.

"I guess the bottom line is — what's it worth?"

Good question. What's it worth to have a little gem of a lake like Fish, out in the middle of nowhere, where you and your kids can catch wild fish all day?

Is a lake like that replaceable?

Taseko Mines is striving to come up with answers to those questions. For information on the project contact the company at 1-800-667-2114.