

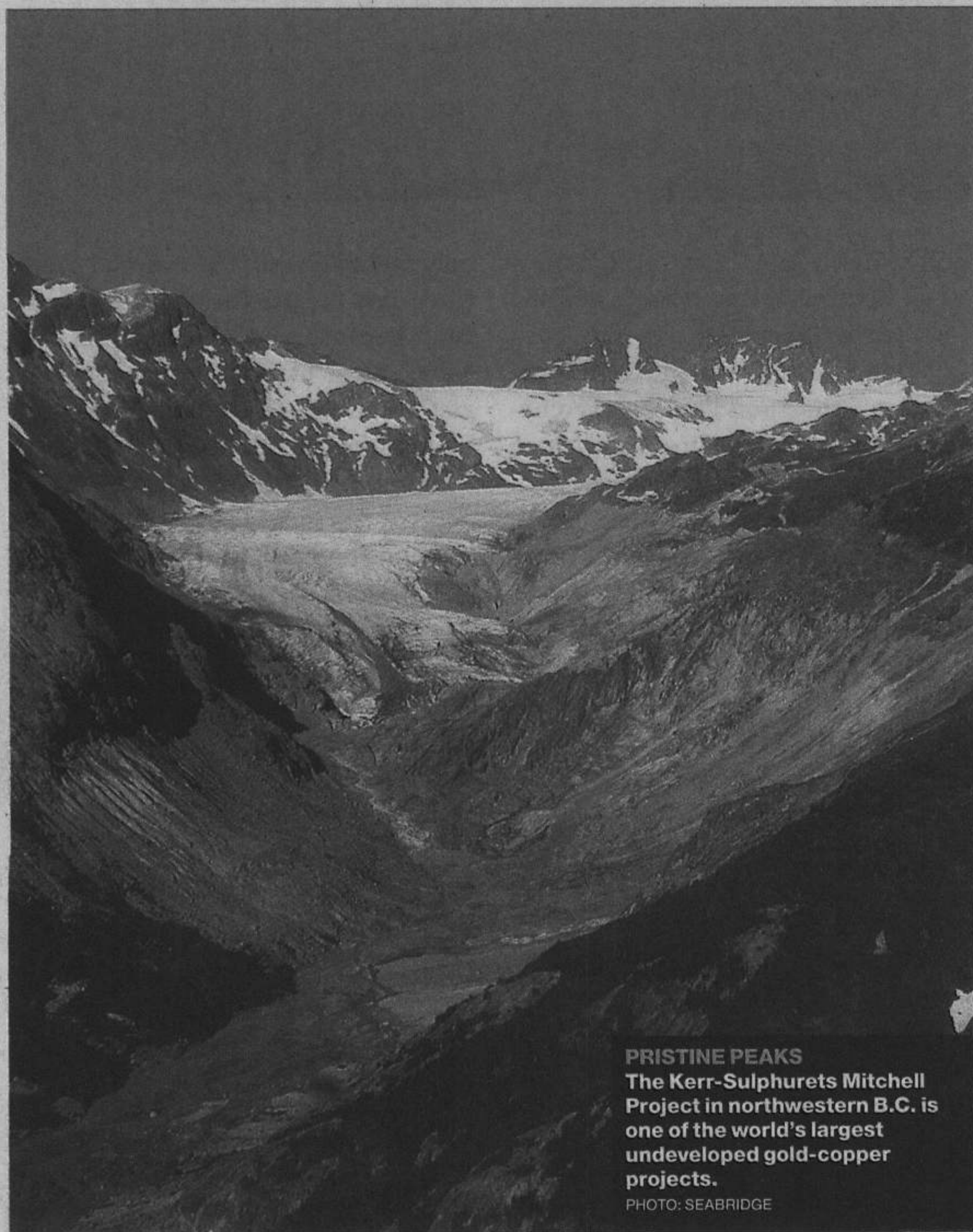
INSPIRATION

# THE COMMUNITY CONNECTION

FACT

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SUSTAINABILITY HAS BECOME THE TOP PRIORITY FOR INDUSTRY



**PRISTINE PEAKS**  
The Kerr-Sulphurets Mitchell Project in northwestern B.C. is one of the world's largest undeveloped gold-copper projects.

PHOTO: SEABRIDGE

■ **Question:** How does an inherently invasive activity, such as mining, minimize its impact on the environment?

■ **Answer:** By embracing the principles of sustainability and involving host communities in the development of mining operations

**British Columbia is home to more new mining projects than any other place in Canada, and the industry's contribution to the provincial economy totals more than \$5 billion annually.**

However, as Pierre Gratton, president of the Mining Association of BC, recently told attendees at a mining conference, the industry can't simply point to jobs and wealth creation and expect the public to support mining. Instead, operators need to embrace sustainable development.

**Taking culture into account**

There are many resource exploration and mining companies in BC that are doing just that. One such example is Seabridge, which is developing a gold mine in northwestern BC. "From the outset we engaged the local community, and listened to their concerns," says Brent Murphy, Seabridge's vice-president en-

vironmental affairs. "It was made very clear by the First Nations that our operations would impact a culturally sensitive creek, so we changed the design of the site to avoid this area."

Further cementing its commitment to sustainability, Seabridge was an early adopter of using DNA techniques to track the migration of grizzly bears in the region. By better understanding the movement patterns of the bears, they are able to develop mining operations in a way that will minimize the impact to these treasured animals.

"The notion of environmental sustainability isn't new," says Murphy, "maybe a half century or more ago, there were irresponsible operators, but most now understand the long-term effects of mining on the environment, and try to minimize that impact."

**Community connection**

Walter Energy Western Coal, which operates three mines in northeastern BC, is another that believes that integrating its work with the community is key for sustainable mining. "It's not just the mining company that can have a deep involvement in environmental sustainability, but also the broader community," says Eric Christensen, the company's vice-president environment and community affairs.

To this end, the company has been working with the First Nations on developing greenhouses that will spawn native tree and plant species to be used in reclamation and restoration projects. The company has ongoing discussions with aboriginal elders in the community to identify what's appropriate to use. "We're especially proud of this work, because it will not only benefit the areas we work in, but will aid other resource users in their restoration work," says Christensen.

While he admits that there will always be cynics, Christensen says there has been a big shift in the industry, and environmental and social sustainability isn't about appeasing people, but rather is built around a strong belief that it's the right way to conduct business. "Mining companies move on, but communities don't," he says. "No longer can we just backfill a mine pit and walk away, and while certainly there's more that can be done, we are making great strides." Christensen adds that mining companies will be judged on what they achieve and how they operate.

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