



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
**DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY**

Central Region Office

1250 West Alder St., Union Gap, WA 98903-0009 • 509-575-2490

February 23, 2023

Douglas McCormick  
Deputy Director/County Engineer  
Snohomish County, Public Works  
3000 Rockefeller Avenue  
Everett, WA 98201

**RE: Ecology's Plans Regarding Creosote Piles to Improve Water Quality in the Monte Cristo Mining Area (MCMA)**

- **Site Name:** Monte Cristo Mining Area
- **Site Address:** 4 Miles SE of Barlow Pass, off Mountain Loop Highway, near Silverton
- **Facility Site ID No.:** 2251399
- **Cleanup Site ID No.:** 4550

Dear Douglas McCormick:

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) appreciates Snohomish County's (County) time in meeting with us virtually on Thursday, February 9, regarding the exploration of an environmental cleanup project at the Twin Bridges site (Site) in the Monte Cristo Mining Area (MCMA). In this letter, we would like to summarize the conceptual project we shared, our takeaways from the meeting, current environmental concerns, and our next steps.

### **Past cleanup efforts and conceptual future projects**

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As presented at our meeting, the previous environmental cleanup at the MCMA occurred around 2015 under both federal CERCLA (Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act) and state MTCA (Model Toxics Control Act) authority. The money for the cleanup work came from the bankruptcy settlement of ASARCO Company's Tacoma copper smelting plant. Approximately \$1 million are left to complete environmental remediation and restoration at the MCMA.

Based on the previous work performed, site constraints and the amount of available funding, additional options for projects in the MCMA are limited.

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The United States Forest Service (USFS) identified and suggested the removal of the creosote piles at the Twin Bridges site as a potential project, along with signage warning hikers about the toxicity of waters. The USFS identified these creosote piles as a concern, based on visual observation of sheens and olfactory sensing creosote odors from the piles. The USFS brought to Ecology's attention that the Northwest Treaty Tribes, and specifically the Sauk-Suiattle Tribe, are interested in removal of the bridge due to its impact on Tribal fishery interest. Addressing water quality impacts is under Ecology's purview and authority under MTCA. This potential project was what prompted Ecology to contact Snohomish County due to bridge ownership.

### **Discussion and takeaway from February 9 meeting**

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We appreciate Snohomish County's concerns about current workload and available resources. Our takeaway is that there are real challenges and limitations in assisting Ecology with the bridge removal. We also appreciate knowing the 1984 special use agreement between the County and the Monte Cristo Preservation Association (MCPA) for the Monte Cristo Road is still in effect. This agreement appears to pose challenges for an arrangement between Ecology and the County in moving forward to remove the piles. Your bridge engineers also provided valuable insight into the logistical challenges of mobilizing pile removal equipment into the area, and concerns over project costs in comparison to available budget.

### **Ecology's environmental concerns and path forward**

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Based on the feedback from the County, Ecology is no longer pursuing the removal of the creosote piles. However, we are still concerned about water quality impacts in the South Fork Sauk River. In accordance with Ecology's mission and role in protecting human health and the environment, Ecology's next steps will be to interact with the Sauk-Suiattle Tribe to assess water quality for environmental impacts. This assessment will help Ecology determine risk and identify future work. It's also consistent with Ecology's commitment to environmental justice. As we go forward, it's possible the Sauk-Suiattle Tribe may be contacting the County regarding access to the Site.

Additionally, Ecology will be working with the USFS on developing appropriate signage for the MCMA that provides hikers and other users with information about health concerns from water sources in historical mining areas.

We'll continue to look for opportunities to utilize our remaining funding in the MCMA.



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### Contact Information

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We very much appreciated you meeting with us and would appreciate your support as needed for our efforts in addressing environmental impacts in the MCMA.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact John Zinza, cleanup project manager by phone at 360-480-1862 or e-mail at [John.Zinza@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:John.Zinza@ecy.wa.gov) or Justin Rice, cleanup project manager by phone at 509-724-8268 or email at [Justin.Rice@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:Justin.Rice@ecy.wa.gov).

Sincerely,



Valerie Bound  
Section Manager  
Toxics Cleanup Program

cc: Joe Gibbens, PE, On Scene Coordinator, US Forest Service, Region 6, via email  
Greta Smith, District Ranger, US Forest Service, Darington Ranger District, via email  
Scott Morris, Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe, Natural Resources Department, via email  
Mike Kahler, President, Monte Cristo Preservation Association, via email  
Fred Cruger, Granite Falls Historical Society, via email

