Van Stone Mine cleanup

Questions & answers: Cleanup Action Plan public meeting

Thank you for coming!

The Washington Department of Ecology held a public meeting June 8, 2023, at the Onion Creek School to explain the proposed Cleanup Action Plan (view the presentation[1]), answer questions, and accept written comments.

We appreciate the questions from the 26 community members who attended and the resulting discussion, which are summarized below.

Question 1: How deep did you take soil samples in the Lower Tailings Pile?

Answer 1: Through the tailings to the native soil, which is about 7–97 feet deep, depending on where the boring was placed.

Q2: What does covering contaminants accomplish? Do they degrade over time?

A2: Metals don't degrade. Capping the consolidated waste will reduce exposure to people and animals and keep the contamination from spreading through erosion and rain and snowmelt infiltrating it.

Q3: Will the cap just be over the top of the waste or include the sides, too?

A3: The cap will cover the side slopes as well. It will be a large cap.

Q4: When you disturb the tailings piles and waste rock during cleanup will people be exposed? Is there contamination on the road?

A4: We have tested the road and didn't find contamination. Dust control by wetting down soil/tailings will be part of the cleanup, as well as controlling runoff. We will be monitoring during the process to ensure contamination isn't leaving the site. We will also maintain the road to mitigate damage from trucks and heavy equipment. If an accident occurs, we will take care of it.

Q5: Where will the topsoil that's going over the cover come from?

A5: The Feasibility Study identified the area to the east of the lower tailings pile as the source. This will be further refined when the engineering design for the cleanup is developed. The draft Engineering Design Report will be available for public review and comment before cleanup starts.

Q6: How many residential wells around the site have been tested?

A6: Seven, and all had metals concentrations at levels that meet drinking water standards.

Q7: Where was soil tested? Was the school tested?

A7: Soil near the school was tested. Some samples had elevated metals, but the exposure pathway was removed when the road was paved. Surface water and sediment samples from near the school met human health criteria. The school's drinking water well results also met drinking water standards. We can test the school property soil and drinking water throughout cleanup construction.

See figures 1 and 2 (pages 3–4) for all the soil and surface water sampling locations and results.

Q8: Why isn't this a Superfund site?

A8: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) evaluated the Van Stone Mine in 2002 as part of their *Preliminary Assessments and Site Inspections Report: Upper Columbia River Mines and Mills: Stevens County, Washington*.[2] EPA's Superfund Technical Assessment and Response Team completed the assessments.

[1] https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/document/126049

[2] https://cfpub.epa.gov/ols/catalog/advanced_brief_record.cfm?&FIELD1=SUBJECT&INPUT1=Acid%20mine%20drainage&TYPE1=EXACT&LOGIC1=AND&COLL=&SORT_TYPE=MTIC&item_count=229&item_accn=353586

While the report recommended the Van Stone Mine be cleaned up, EPA has not proposed adding it to the National Priorities List.

Q9: What if there's a wildfire in the area? Could firefighting potentially spread contamination?

A9: Controlling the fire and protecting personal and public property would be the highest priority. Pulling water from Lotze and Onion creeks for firefighting is fine, as they are clean.

Q10: Will the North Pit Lake dam actually be removed?

A10: Not fully, its height will be slowly lessened to "remove" it from Ecology's Dam Safety Office's jurisdiction and reduce the risk of dam failure. The process will be careful and slow because a lot of water is in the lake (100 ft. deep in spots).

Q11: Will the cleanup work go on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week?

A11: No, it will only be seasonal (after snow melt through fall) and during normal daytime working hours.

Q12: How is cleanup funded?

A12: We have used money from ASARCO's bankruptcy proceedings for everything so far, and we have about $2 million remaining to complete the work to improve the dam. While other responsible parties may assist with funding, Ecology plans to request more from the Legislature in 2025, when we next have the opportunity. Funding runs on two-year cycles, so requests have already gone in for 23–25. We need to spend the remaining ASARCO funds before requesting more, but we are confident we will be given funding to complete the cleanup.

Q13: Did you sample the nearby creeks?

A13: Yes, we sampled the water and sediment (soil, sand, rocks in and next to the creek bed).

See Figure 2 for locations.

Q14: Why don't you cap the Upper Tailings Pile in place instead of risking moving it to the Lower Tailings Pile?

A14: The ongoing maintenance of two caps would be much more expensive. The Upper Tailings Pile also poses a greater risk as-is because it has a much steeper slope next to it and has failed previously.

Q15: Who administers the contract to do the cleanup work?

A15: As long as the state is funding cleanup, Ecology does.

Q16: Will there be a washdown area for vehicles exiting the site?

A16: That is a good idea, and we will add it to the engineering design.

Q17: There have been logging trucks that appear to be coming from the area near the site coming by the school and kicking up dust. We are concerned about contamination in the dust.

A17: While we can't regulate logging activities, we can inquire with Vaagen Brothers about it.

Q18: Wasn't there a PVC membrane cover previously? How will this cap be different?

A18: Yes, but it was exposed to the sun, so it degraded. That's why we're burying the final cover.

Q19: If Onion Creek connects to the Columbia River, what about a catastrophic failure causing site contaminants to reach the river?

A19: The past failure at the Upper Tailings Pile only affected people locally. The distance to the Columbia River and the amount of water/contamination make it impossible for the site to affect the river.

Q20: How far into the creek bed do you test?

Q20: A couple inches down — this is the area most likely to be affected.

Related Information

- Van Stone Mine cleanup site page: https://bit.ly/EcologyVanStone
- Facility Site ID: 1554858, Cleanup Site ID: 461

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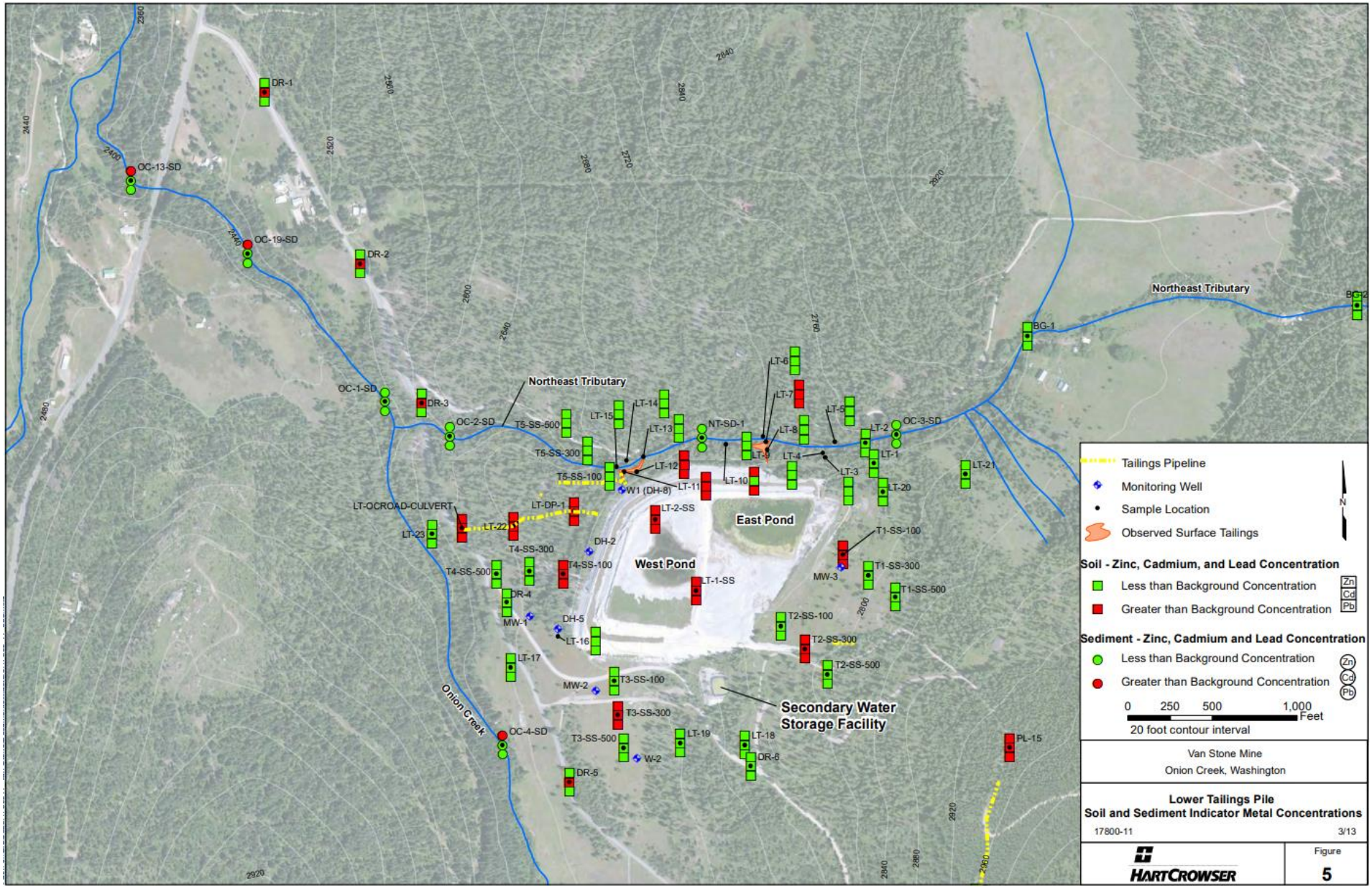
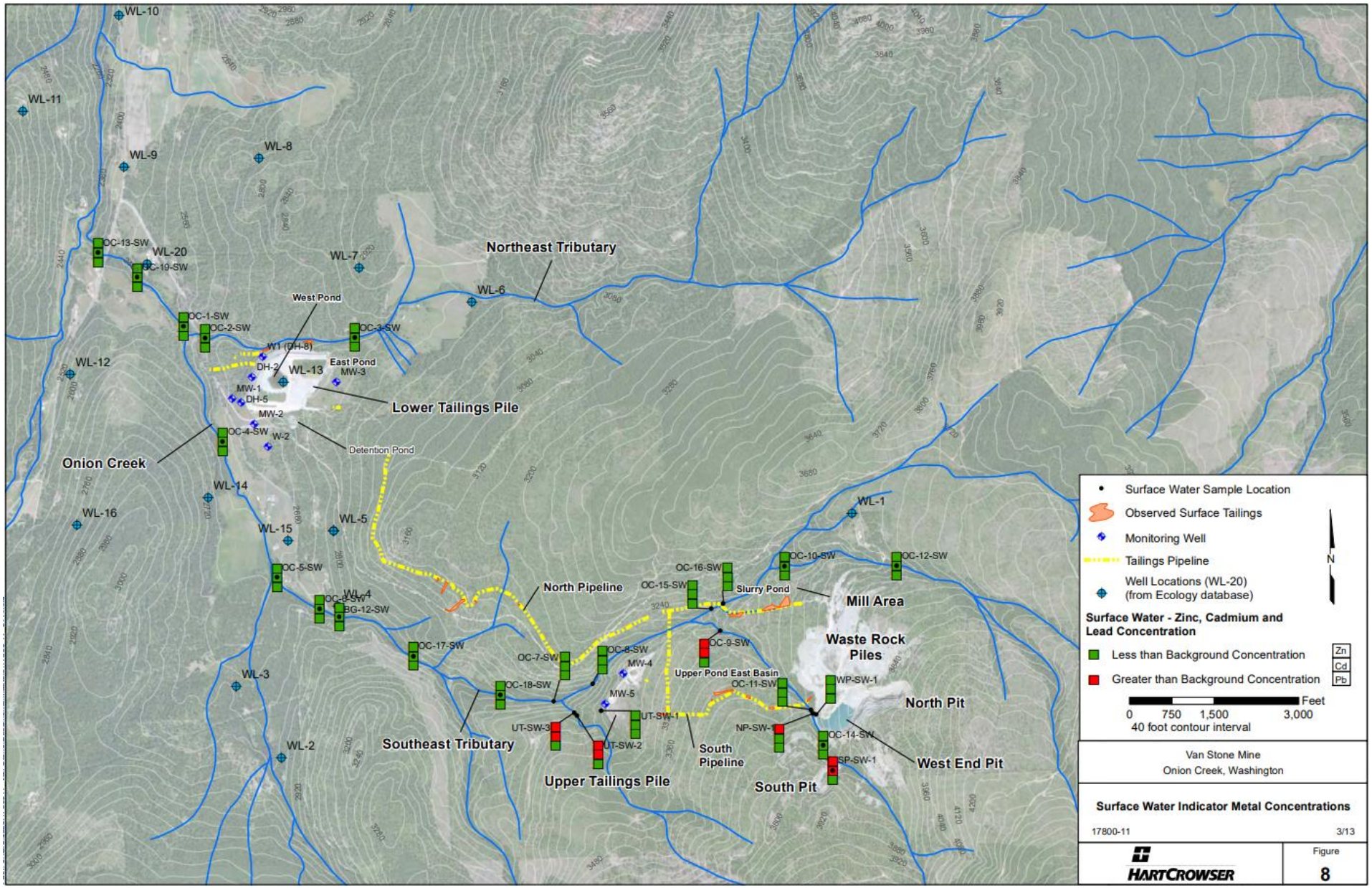
To request an ADA accommodation, contact Ecology by phone at 509-385-2290 or email at erika.beresovoy@ecy.wa.gov, or visit https://ecology.wa.gov/accessibility. For Relay Service or TTY call 711 or 877-833-6341.

Figure 1. Soil and sediment sampling locations[3]



[3] From *Van Stone Mine Remedial Investigation* (Hart Crowser, 2013), Figures 1-11: https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/document/24614.

Figure 2. Surface water sampling locations[4]



[4] From *Van Stone Mine Remedial Investigation* (Hart Crowser, 2013), Figures 1-11: https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/document/24614.