



The Teghut Copper Mine Project in Armenia: An Overview

The Armenian Copper Programme, a privately owned company, plans to build a massive open-pit copper mine in the small town of Teghut, Armenia. The mine threatens local ecosystems and communities. Here are some of the problems it poses:

Increased deforestation

The mine is positioned to level over 1,500 acres of forest, reducing biodiversity and damaging local ecosystems. Armenia has already lost most of its forests. Only about eight percent of the country is forested, down from a peak of more than 40 percent, and former forests are turning to desert. At the current rate, the country could become completely deforested by 2030.

Threatened wildlife

Previous deforestation has resulted in many native Armenian species becoming endangered. In the Teghut region, at least 19 plant species, 21 mammals and 11 fish species—including the caucasian persimmon, the caucasian gray bear, and several types of eagle—are already listed as endangered or threatened. The mine will degrade what little habitat remains for these species.

Air pollution

Pollutants from the mine's processing facilities could be expected to include carbon monoxide, nitrous dioxide, dust and other harmful particles. Air pollution from other copper processing sights operated by the same company has already caused health problems for people in the region, including infertility, cardiovascular disease, malignancy, and respiratory diseases. There is also evidence that existing air pollution has caused birth defects. New air pollution from the mine would make things worse.

Water pollution

Plans call for toxic molybdenum ore waste from the mine to be dumped in a nearby gorge. Due to a low yield concentration of desired minerals, 98 percent of the ore will be dumped in the gorge. The Shnogh River flows through this gorge and the impact that the toxic sludge would have on aquatic life and water quality downstream will be devastating.

Economic consequences

The mine is being promoted as a catalyst for economic development in the region. However however, the economic consequences for local communities are most likely to negative, as a result of increased health problems and a desecrated environment. The mine company has failed to live up to hiring commitments it made at other mines, and after the mine shuts down, any initial economic benefits could disappear.

A Better Alternative Exists

Armenia is a deeply impoverished country, and economic development is an important goal, but poverty cannot be alleviated over the long run without the *sustainable* use of natural resources. Luckily, Teghut, with its rich forests, is a prime candidate for ecotourism. Ecotourism promotes both environmental conservation and sustainable development, and it is already a growing industry in Armenia. The jobs created by ecotourism could be long-lasting and spur other economic growth. The Teghut forest can and should become a protected area for the purpose of ecotourism.

Because Armenia's government does not respond to its people, international pressure is what's most needed.

You can make a difference: Please visit www.foe.org/armenia today to urge the United States government to express its concern about this mine and ask that the Teghut forest be saved.