

Community Update

Kennecott Mines and Mill Town Site

June 2024

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Alaska Region



Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and
Preserve

SITE BACKGROUND

The Kennecott Mines and Mill Town Site (the Site) is located in the Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark (KNHL) within the 13.2 million-acre Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST), approximately 3.5 miles north of the town of McCarthy. The Mill Town portion of the Site is located within the Mill Site Unit of the Kennicott Subdivision and is comprised of over 100 historic structures, including former operational structures such as the Mill Building, Leaching Plant, Power Plant, and numerous housing and support structures. Many of the structures associated with historical operations within the Mill Town are located on lands administered by the National Park Service (NPS). Within the Mill Town, NPS-managed public land and privately-owned land is interspersed. The Site is a popular tourist destination.

The Kennecott mines, mill, and related facilities were developed and operated by the Kennecott Copper Corporation between 1906 and 1938. The Mill Building, and later the Leaching Plant, received and concentrated ore from the nearby mines. Today, the Mill Town primarily consists of historic buildings and other structures that were used to support the copper ore processing operations. Known types of wastes generated as a result of copper ore processing operations include lead- and arsenic-based paint, mill tailings, blasting caps, boiler ash, asbestos containing material (ACM), and petroleum-related wastes from spills.



Picture of the Kennecott Mill Building

ENVIRONMENTAL INVESTIGATIONS



Soil sampling at Kennecott

In 2015, NPS began environmental investigations to evaluate potential risks posed to human health and the environment by contaminants at the Site and to evaluate potential remedies to address identified risks. These investigations are being conducted pursuant to NPS's cleanup authority under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), also referred to as Superfund. NPS is the CERCLA "lead agency" at the Site, responsible for planning and directing the Site investigation and cleanup activities.

A Preliminary Assessment (PA) was conducted in 2017 and included review of historical reports and documentation as well as a site reconnaissance. Based upon the results of the PA, NPS determined that a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS), was necessary to fully characterize the nature and extent of contamination from historical operations that may pose a risk to the public and/or the environment and to evaluate alternatives

for a permanent remedy. The first phase of field work for the RI was completed in August 2021 and the second phase of field work for the RI was completed in July 2023.

PHASE III REMEDIAL INVESTIGATION TO BEGIN ON JUNE 21, 2024

From approximately June 21 to July 1, 2024, NPS contractors will collect surface soil samples at the NPS-owned Silk Stocking Cottages and in areas north and east of the Mill Town, as well as surface water and sediment samples from National Creek. A second mobilization is planned for September (approximate dates September 3 to September 15, 2024) to install groundwater monitoring wells using a drill rig and collect groundwater and subsurface soil samples. Sampling during both field programs will be conducted on federal lands within and outside the Mill Town.

Phase III RI field investigation activities are being planned and implemented in close coordination with Park staff to protect public safety and lessen impacts to Mill Town businesses. Mill Town areas and buildings that are currently open to the public will remain open during investigation activities; however, an exclusion zone will be established around active work areas using safety cones, stakes, and/or caution tape, as needed. Residents and visitors are asked to respect the boundaries that are established for their safety and the safety of the sampling crew. Field work is expected to take approximately 10 days for the first mobilization and approximately 12 days for the second mobilization, with field personnel performing various tasks during daylight hours on both weekdays and weekends.

NEXT STEPS

As the remedial investigation proceeds, NPS will continue to evaluate data to further its understanding of the nature and extent of contamination at the Site. Ultimately, a Remedial Investigation Report will document the cumulative results of the multiple phases of field investigation and evaluations of the potential risks to human health and the environment posed by Site contamination.



Surface water sampling at Kennecott

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Community involvement is an important part of the NPS CERCLA process. Information repositories have been established in the three locations identified below. These repositories house copies of the Site administrative record file. CERCLA administrative record files consist of those documents that will form the basis for the selection of the Site cleanup action. They may include documents such as reports of all Site-related environmental investigations, ecological and human health risk assessments, community relations materials, public comments, and responses to significant comments. CERCLA administrative record files are updated periodically. Electronic copies of the documents currently in the Administrative Record File, including the Kennecott Community Involvement Plan, are available on-line on the Park's website (<https://www.nps.gov/wrst/learn/management/kennecott-mines-and-mill-town-site-environmental-investigation-project.htm>). A copy of the Kennecott Community Involvement Plan is also available at each of the information repositories; call for an appointment to review the records in person.

Kennecott Mines and Mill Town Site Information Repositories:

NPS Alaska Regional Office

240 W 5th Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99501
Contact: Sarah Venator
Phone: (907) 644-3573

Kennecott Visitor Center

Blackburn School
Kennecott, AK 99588
Phone: (907) 205-7106

WRST Park Headquarters

Mile 106.8 Richardson Highway
Copper Center, AK 99573-0439
Contact: Benjamin Pister
Phone: (907) 822-7212

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

If you have questions concerning the information contained in this Community Update, please contact Sarah Venator, NPS Contaminated Site Project Manager, via email at sarah_venator@nps.gov, or Benjamin Pister, NPS Park Contact, via email at benjamin_pister@nps.gov.