

Community Update

Kennecott Mines and Mill Town Site

July 2023

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. The Mill Town 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. Currently much of the Mill Town is on lands administered by the National Park Service (NPS) and 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.

PHASE II REMEDIAL INVESTIGATION TO BEGIN ON JULY 15, 2023

From approximately July 15 to July 25, 2023, NPS will be initiating Phase II of the RI for the Site. During the investigation, NPS contractors will be collecting environmental samples from various locations on federal lands in the Mill Town portion of the Site as follows:

- Soil samples to estimate metal concentrations and assess the horizontal extent of mill tailings and ore/ore concentrates.
- Surface water and sediment samples from National Creek to assess Site-related contaminant migration.

Phase II RI field investigation activities are being planned and implemented in close coordination with Park staff to protect public safety. Mill Town areas and buildings 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, 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 comprehensive Remedial Investigation Report will document the results of the multiple phases of field investigation and the extent to which Site contamination poses potential risks to human health and the environment.

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, and 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 Site Community Involvement Plan also is available at each of the information repositories; call for an appointment to review the records in person.



Surface water sampling at Kennecott

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: Mark E. Miller
Phone: (907) 302-1373

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

If you have questions concerning the information contained in this Community Update, please contact Sarah Venator, NPS Federal Government Lead, via email at sarah_venator@nps.gov, or Mark Miller, NPS Park Contact, via email at memiller@nps.gov.