Project Basics

The proposed Red Chris Mine would be a conventional shovel and truck open-pit copper-gold-silver mine located 18 km southeast of the town of Iskut, in the Stikine watershed in northwestern British Columbia. The proposed mine would process 30,000 tons of ore per day over a mine life of 28 years. Red Chris Development Company Ltd., a wholly owned subsidiary of Imperial Metals Corporation, has a 100% interest in the Red Chris claims and would operate the mine.

Red Chris is the most advanced mine proposal in the southern transboundary region. The proposed mine is located in the territory of the Tahltan First Nation, in high value wildlife habitat, with a tailings storage area – approximately 4 km long and 1.2 km wide – located in fish bearing waters. Despite First Nations objections and a court challenge that went all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, Red Chris received an Environmental Assessment Certificate and project construction permits.

Development of the Red Chris mine is contingent on completion of construction of the Northwest Transmission Line (NTL), currently scheduled to be operational in spring 2014. Imperial Metals aims to tie into the NTL by building a power transmission line from Bob Quinn to the mine site, and begin production by spring 2014. Initial mine construction cost is estimated to be $500 million. Ore concentrate is planned to be trucked from the proposed mine to the deep-water port at Stewart, B.C., and shipped to a smelter overseas.

About Imperial Metals

Imperial Metals Corporation is a Canadian mining company based in Vancouver, B.C. The company is active in the acquisition, exploration, development, mining and production of base and precious metals. It has two operating open pit mines: Mount Polley in central B.C. and a 50% interest in the Huckleberry mine in northern B.C. Its development properties are Red Chris and Sterling, a previously operated underground and open pit mine in Nevada. It also has two exploration properties.
Threats to Conservation

The proposed Red Chris mine poses a high level of risk to water quality and fish habitat, and threatens to devastate wildlife habitat on Todagin Mountain, a sweeping high country plateau above the headwaters lake chain of the Iskut River. The plateau is home to the largest lambing herd of Stone’s sheep in the world, as well as wolves, grizzlies, caribou, black bears, wolverines, and golden eagles. The wildlife habitat at the proposed mine site is contiguous with Todagin South Slope Park, which was designated as a Class A provincial park in 2001 to protect the Stone’s sheep critical wintering and lambing habitat. Wolverine, fisher and grizzly bear are blue-listed species in Todagin Park. Mountain goats are found on the precipitous slopes and cliffs, while lower slopes provide high quality moose habitat. The proposed mine would erode conservation gains made by the establishment of the park.

Draining the south side of Todagin plateau is a Y-shaped valley containing Black Lake, Todagin Lake and Kluea Lake, a spawning ground for rainbow trout, which flows downstream into the Iskut River. Under the Fisheries Act of Canada, it’s illegal to put harmful substances into fish-bearing waters. However, under Schedule Two of the mining effluent regulations, lakes can be redefined as “tailings impoundment areas.” Imperial Metals proposes to use Black Lake as a Tailings Impoundment Area, blocking 80% of the stream flow to Todagin and Kluea Lake, and creating long-term contamination concerns. Over the life of the mine, Red Chris could leave behind 183 million tons of toxic tailings and 307 million tons of waste rock, which would likely need to be treated for acid mine drainage in perpetuity.

Review Process Status

Federal approval for the Red Chris project under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA) was given in May 2006. The Federal approval was subsequently challenged by Sierra Legal Defence Fund (now Ecojustice), on behalf of MiningWatch Canada, who sought an order from the federal court to stop the Red Chris mine project and involve the public in the environmental assessment process.
Exploration roads and drill pads at the proposed Red Chris mine site have already fragmented wildlife habitat on the world famous Todagin Plateau. Photo by Mike Fay.

The legal case was a test for Section 21 of the CEAA, which outlines projects that require public consultations. Under the act, a metal mine development producing 3,000 tons or more of ore per day must undergo a comprehensive assessment, which includes public participation. The Red Chris Mine could produce 10 times the targeted number. Sierra Legal alleged the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Natural Resources Canada undertook a simple screening assessment that did not include public participation, and that under the legislation, the Red Chris mine had to be considered as a major project and therefore public consultations should have been allowed.

Sierra Legal won the initial court case. A subsequent decision by the Supreme Court of Canada, on January 21, 2010, agreed that the Red Chris mine project did not go through a comprehensive federal environmental assessment. However, the Supreme Court also said that because MiningWatch Canada does not have a financial stake in the mine, and did not challenge the findings of the EA process, the Federal approval would be upheld, allowing mine permitting and development to proceed. The decision means that future large development projects will need to undergo full environmental reviews.

A provincial Environmental Assessment Certificate was obtained in August 2005 and extended in July 2010. Permits for project construction were issued in May 2012.

**Time Frame**

Imperial Metals proposes to begin processing ore at Red Chris by May 2014 when the NTL is scheduled to come online. Construction began at Red Chris in May 2012 and the company purchased mill equipment in fall 2012. The majority of the engineering of the processing plant has been completed. The company will need to secure further debt financing in 2013 to fund construction costs for the Red Chris project.

Red Chris cannot be developed without connecting to the NTL. To obtain power to the mine site, Imperial Metals and BC Hydro announced in March 2013 that Imperial Metals would build a 93 km extension of the NTL to Tatogga Lake and the Red Chris mine. BC Hydro agreed to buy the 287 kV NTL extension for $52 million, and to build a smaller power line from Tatogga Lake to Iskut. The line to Red Chris will not require a new environmental assessment, and is exempt from reviews that would normally be required to determine if it was necessary or if construction costs have been properly assessed.
First Nations Positions

The Tahltan Central Council (TCC), on behalf of the Tahltan Nation, has not approved the Red Chris project. In government-to-government negotiations between the TCC and the Province of British Columbia, the Province has provided a mandate for revenue sharing for the Tahltan on the Red Chris project. However, as noted in a May 2011 TCC newsletter, “the Tahltan will not agree to enter into this negotiation until the project has been approved by the Tahltan Nation.” In May 2012, the Tahltan Central Council announced its opposition to the Red Chris mine. “We have been expressing concerns about the impacts of this proposed mine to our communities, our traditional practices, our environment, our cultural values and our Aboriginal title and rights for years,” said TCC President Annita McPhee. “This mine … poses risks for the Klappan, one of the most sensitive and important areas for the Tahltan people. Not everything has been done to address our concerns about long-term pollution to our water, and the damage to a landscape that our people have relied on to feed and support themselves since time immemorial.”

Vocal opposition to the proposed Red Chris mine has also come from the community of Iskut. In 2006, First Nations members from Iskut raised a blockade against BC Metals, which previously owned the proposed Red Chris mine, arguing that the company should not be allowed to degrade fish spawning grounds without the consent of the nearby community. “We want to stop the mine,” said James Dennis, a Talhtan elder from Iskut. “The animals will be drinking that water and they’ll all be polluted too. Once they do the mine, they’re going to leave, and we’re the people who are going to live with that. Not me, but my grandchildren, the small little kids … That’s who’s going to live with the pollution.”

Summary

The Red Chris mine is an open pit copper-gold-silver mine being developed by Imperial Metals southeast of Iskut, B.C. in Tahltan Nation territory. Permits have been obtained and construction has started at the mine site. The project is dependent on completion of the NTL, which is scheduled to be in service by May 2014. A power line extension will be built by Imperial Metals to tie in to the NTL. The Tahltan Nation has expressed its opposition to the mine because of environmental and cultural risks. The Red Chris mine would turn a pristine valley and a lake into a tailings pond, and seriously damage wildlife habitat on the Todagin Plateau.
RIVERS WITHOUT BORDERS

TRANSBOUNDARY WATERSHED CONSERVATION BRIEFING  Red Chris Mine Proposal  • Spring 2013

Source: http://www.imperialmetals.com/i/map/redchris/17_RegionalMap.jpg
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**Resources**


Imperial Metals Red Chris mine project information – http://www.imperialmetals.com/s/Development_RedChris.asp


B.C. Environmental Assessment Office – Red Chris Project
http://a100.gov.bc.ca/appsdata/epic/html/deploy/epic_project_home_238.html

Tahltan Central Council – http://www.tahltan.org/