

Federal agency rejects mine lease near Mount St. Helens

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By **KATHIE DURBIN, Columbian Staff Writer**

The Bureau of Land Management has rejected a lease application from a Colorado-based company that wants to mine for copper about 12 miles northeast of the Mount St. Helens crater, just outside the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument.

Ed Shepard, BLM director for Washington and Oregon, said Wednesday the agency could not determine that the mining lease would be compatible with the purpose for which the lands in question were re-acquired by the federal government. A portion of the land was purchased with federal Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars to be managed for recreation and conservation.

General Oly, formerly Idaho General Mines Inc., sought to mine 217 acres on the south-facing slope of Goat Mountain. A mine of the size proposed would eradicate much of Goat Mountain, a 5,400-foot promontory on the northern edge of the volcano blast zone, according to a geologist with the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The area was excluded from national monument boundaries because of existing mining claims at the time the monument was established.

The BLM chose the "no-action" alternative in its decision on the project, but Shepard said that's not the end of the process. The company could still apply for a mineral exploration permit at any time, he said, and the federal government still retains discretion to approve actual exploration.

Emily Platt, executive director of the Gifford Pinchot Task Force, an environmental group that opposes the mine, was jubilant at the news.

"That is so exciting," she said. "We were assuming it would go the other way. This is good news for the communities that are downstream of the mine, including Kelso and Longview. It's great news for threatened fish runs in the Green River. It's great news for those who horseback ride and hike in the area because they won't have to see several mine trucks every day. But the fight's not over."

Representatives of General Oly could not immediately be reached for comment.

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