

TIFFANY & CO.

To: Dale Bosworth
Chief, U.S. Forest Service

Re: Preserving the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness

Dear Mr. Bosworth:

Given your previous assignment as Regional Forester in northern Montana, you know well the stark beauty of the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness area, a distinctive precinct of the Kootenai National Forest. You are also familiar with the dispute over a plan to allow construction of a mine that would dig three miles of tunnels under those mountains so that copper and silver could be extracted over three decades.

Forest Service officials in the region have approved the Rock Creek project in concept despite vehement opposition by a coalition of local, regional and national conservation groups, along with local business representatives, public officials and ordinary citizens. The opponents' fears are justified.

This huge mine would discharge millions of gallons of waste water per day conveying pollutants to the Clark Fork River and ultimately into Lake Pend Oreille in Idaho, a national treasure in its own right. Vast quantities of mine tailings—a polite term for toxic sludge—would be stored in a holding facility of questionable durability. Wildlife already struggling to survive would face new perils.

Other disputes of this nature, involving public lands administered by the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management, are too often settled in favor of developers because statutes and departmental regulations tilt that way. The 1872 General Mining Act is a particularly egregious example. Enacted to encourage rapid development of sparsely settled regions at a very different stage in American history, this obsolete law virtually gives away public lands and the minerals under them to private interests. It remains a perverse incentive for mining in wilderness areas, near scenic watersheds, around important cold water fisheries, and in other fragile ecosystems—all of which are inappropriate for mineral development.

The Rock Creek proposal still faces some regulatory hurdles, as well as legal challenges in both state and federal courts. As the process unfolds, Rock Creek may well become an important icon in what I hope will be a growing national debate over responsible mining policies. That debate must take into account the reality that public land has multiple uses, and some of our most significant land should be protected from mining. This precious real estate should be available to Americans with diverse interests including hunting, fishing and hiking in unspoiled areas.

We at Tiffany & Co. understand that mining must remain an important industry. But like some other businesses benefiting from trade in precious metals, we also believe that reforms are urgently needed. Minerals should—and can—be extracted, processed and used in ways that are environmentally and socially responsible. Government and industry each has a role to play in shaping sensible measures to achieve this goal.

As this effort goes forward, I hope that we can look to the Forest Service and its sister Federal agencies for cooperation. Three years ago, you told the House subcommittee, "The Forest Service should be judged by how we leave the land. . . ." All of us who have any influence on how public lands are used should be judged by the same criterion.



Michael J. Kowalski
Chairman of the Board and
Chief Executive Officer
March 24, 2004