



BOSTON HILL'S CENTURY-LONG MINING LEGACY INCLUDES A NUMBER OF DEEP, WIDE, AND UNFENCED OPEN PITS, INCLUDING SOME DIRECTLY ADJACENT TO POPULAR HIKING TRAILS THAT WIND THROUGH THIS SILVER CITY DESIGNATED OPEN SPACE. (RICHARD MAHLER PHOTO)

ABANDONED MINE PROJECT PROPOSED FOR BOSTON HILL

Community Input Sought By State Planners

by Claire Catlett, OSM/VISTA Staffer

Last fall the New Mexico Abandoned Mine Land Program (AML) announced "it is moving forward with a comprehensive plan to protect the public from the dangers of old Silver City area mines on Boston Hill." Ken Romig, of Dekker/Perich/Sabatini—an architecture, planning, engineering, landscape, and interiors firm based in Albuquerque—is project lead. Timothy Karpoff, also with DPS, is the project meeting facilitator.

AML is part of the New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department's Mining and Minerals Division. It is conducting a planning effort to safeguard hazardous mine conditions with a team that includes planners, landscape architects, biologists, and engineers assigned to conduct an assessment of the environmental conditions of the Boston Hill Open Space. Part of the effort involves contacting members of the community in order to determine the level of interest in safeguarding this area. Such activities could include placing netting over open shafts, installing closures at mine openings that would simultaneously protect bats and other wildlife, and enhancement of recreational amenities with the goal of also improving public safety and preserving historic resources.

AML project members and its manager, John Kretzmann, met with Silver City's Town Council at the latter's January 8 meeting. Kretzmann explained how New Mexico's AML program was formed in 1981 as a result of the 1977 Federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act. An AML fund based on active coal mining in New Mexico was established at that time. Funds raised in our state are spent here, tackling public safety hazards involving historic coal and hardrock mines.

AML has three funding priorities: immediate and high-level public health and safety problems associated with abandoned mine lands; health and safety issues that are not an immediate hazard; and restoration of water and soil resources and lands degraded by historic mining practices. In hardrock mining districts such as Boston Hill the third-mentioned priority must enhance and facilitate the other two.

AML has worked on Boston Hill in the past by constructing netting over old mine shafts. It continues to be an area of interest due to its proximity to Silver City and the potential for endangering public safety. The proposed plan might address the following: (1) reduce public safety hazards; (2) protect wildlife habitat associated with mine features; (3) improve recreational amenities; and (4) protect sensitive wildlife and plant species associated with historic mining areas. Romig and Karpoff say these are only suggested areas of concern, not definite targets. Through community meetings and stakeholder interviews, primary areas of local concern will be defined and goals developed for the project. Importantly, AML is clear that a "no action" option is on the table and if the community says "no" to a project, Boston Hill will be left "as is."

AML has announced four project phases: assessment, plan, design, and construction assistance. It is currently in the assessment stage. This includes studies of soils, the environment, and mapping of mining features and natural habitats on the hill. It is expected that this will be complete by March. The following stage will include community input meetings set to begin March 19 at 6 p.m. at a location to be announced. Depending on the outcome of these meetings, design would begin by this summer. Elements of a construction assistance phase would be determined later, possibly as early as this fall. AML says construction activities could span three or more years, depending on what projects, if any, are agreed upon. For more information contact the AML Program Manager at 505.476.3423 or John.Kretzmann@state.nm.us; ASLA Associate Ken Romig at 505.761.9700, or kenr@dpsdesign.org; Project Meeting Facilitator Timothy Karpoff at 505.877.6041 or timkarpoff@msn.com.



CHAIN-LINK FENCES SURROUND SOME OF BOSTON HILL'S PROMINENT OLD MINING FEATURES, BUT SOME, AS IN THIS INSTANCE, ARE IN DISREPAIR. REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE'S ABANDONED MINE LAND PROGRAM WILL HOLD A COMMUNITY MEETING IN SILVER CITY AT 6 PM ON MARCH 19 TO DISCUSS POSSIBLY IMPLEMENTING NEW SAFEGUARDS ON THE HILL.

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