

# **ARGENTINE PEOPLE REJECT MINING PROPOSAL**

## **PROPOSED GOLD MINE WOULD DISRUPT ECOTOURISM AND FISHERIES IN SCENIC PATAGONIA**

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For more information, including digital images, go to: <http://www.mineralpolicy.org/intl/esquel/esquel.php>

**MARCH 24, Esquel, Argentina**—In a referendum held yesterday, residents of a town in Argentina’s pristine Patagonian region declared a resounding “no” to gold mining. Around 80 percent of the citizens of Esquel (population 30,000) voted against a proposal by U.S.-based Meridian Gold to dig an open-pit gold mine less than 7 kilometers from their town.

“The Esquel community has expressed its political will: that the Canadian company Meridian Gold should immediately leave this project and leave Esquel”, said Pablo Quintana, from the *Asamblea de Vecinos Autoconvocados*, an informal gathering of local citizens to oppose the gold mine.

The referendum took place peacefully, with 75 percent of residents attending the vote. In recent months, thousands of the town’s residents have taken to the streets in protest of the proposal, concerned about impacts on the region’s vibrant ecotourism industry, trout fisheries, agriculture and increased pressure on already scarce water supplies.

The proposed mine is located just 28 miles from the Los Alerces National Park, an important tourist destination and home to an endangered species of tree known as the *alerce*, a southern relative of the giant sequoia that can live to be 2,000 or 3,000 years old.

Impacts on freshwater quality and supply have seriously concerned local residents. Meridian proposes to dump contaminated mine-tailings and waste rock in a holding area that could leak into local aquifers and streams. The Willimanco lagoon, that provides drinking water to the Esquel population may be at risk if any seepage or acid drainage occurs even years after the closure of the mine.

Says Payal Sampat of Mineral Policy Center, “The people of Esquel have made a courageous decision that the mining industry and the Argentinean government must respect.”

Adds Greenpeace Argentina's Véronica Odriozola: "The people of Esquel are saying today that they want and need jobs for everyone in the community—but these must be based on sustainable activities. They do not wish to pay the price of gold mining, and this is a historic decision for a poor country."

## **Flawed Environmental Impact Assessment**

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) published by Meridian Gold is flawed and inadequate, according to a report recently completed by Dr. Robert Moran, a hydrogeologist and geochemist who surveyed the proposed mine site at Esquel in February. According to Dr. Moran, "the EIA certainly would not be acceptable to regulators in western European countries, the U.S.A., or Canada." The report adds, "The wastes that will result from this mine would remain on the top of this mountain forever."

Commissioned by Mineral Policy Center and Greenpeace Argentina, the report also states: "Esquel is the classic example...where an EIA describes short-term benefits and solutions, but fails to even begin to consider long-term consequences."

Dr. Moran's report, *Esquel, Argentina: Predictions and Promises of a Flawed EIA*, describes in detail the mine's potential impacts, including problems with the area's water supplies. To view the report, go to: <http://www.mineralpolicy.org/publications/pdf/PredictionsPromisesFINAL.pdf>

## **Meridian Gold's Toxic History in the U.S.**

Mines owned or run by Meridian have created serious toxic pollution in at least three locations in the United States. One of the largest emitters of atmospheric mercury in the U.S. is the Jerritt Canyon mine in Nevada, which was part-owned by Meridian until its recent sale. This mine emits more than 10 times the amount of mercury released by a typical U.S. power plant. The tailings facility at Jerritt Canyon has been leaking since it was constructed in the 1980s.

Another Meridian-owned mine, Nevada's Paradise Peak, is marked by a lake with collapsing walls and water that is turning acidic. Notes Dr. Glenn Miller, board member of Great Basin Mine Watch in Nevada, USA: "the decision of the citizens of Esquel is prudent given the unreclaimed environmental damage that Meridian has left behind in Nevada. Meridian should not be permitted to open a mine in Argentina."

One of two pits at Meridian's Beartrack mine in Salmon, Idaho, is showing signs of acid formation. The runoff from this and the rest of the mine may require extremely expensive, and perpetual, water treatment.

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