

Selkirk Conservation Alliance
P.O. Box 1809
Priest River, ID 83856

September 6, 2018

To: All concerned parties

Selkirk Conservation Alliance writes today to formally announce its opposition to the proposed PacWest Silicon Smelter to be located outside of Newport, WA. The Selkirk Conservation Alliance (SCA) has advocated to protect the Priest Lake/River watershed for the last 31 years.

Our vision statement is: “The Selkirk Conservation Alliance is the leading and faithful advocate to all who live, love and benefit from Priest Lake and its surroundings. We are committed to understanding, supporting and protecting the environment and all living beings found here. We are dedicated to the educational programs and scientific research that support and maintain this rare and exceptional environment for future generations.”

A coalition of organizations including CANNIS, Responsible Growth North East Washington, the Kalispel Tribe of Indians, private citizens and other organizations have previously described the potential negative health and economic impact of this smelter. These include air pollution, odor, acid rain, increased truck and train traffic, and decreased property values in homes located near and down wind of the smelter.

We are compelled to point out the potential negative environmental, health and economic impacts that this smelter may have on the Priest Lake/River watershed and beyond. The smelter is initially projected to generate 760 tons per year of SO₂ and 700 tons of NO_x making the smelter the 5th largest emitter of sulfur and the 15th largest emitter of oxides of nitrogen in Washington State. Much more may be generated as the smelter ramps up production in years to come. In addition 85 tons per year of fine particulates (P_{2.5}) will be generated. These are mostly 1 micron particles, so small the lungs cannot filter them out, thereby providing immediate access to the blood stream. Most of the year the prevailing winds blow from the South and Southwest which will carry this pollution directly into the Priest River Basin. Even in the winter when Northeast winds are prominent, a passing weather system will invariably result in winds veering to the Southwest. Precipitation falling through the chemical laced atmosphere will result in the formation of sulfuric and nitric acid. This will then fall on our environment increasing the acidity of the soil and waters. The HiTest commissioned PSD modeling study commented on surrounding national parks and wilderness areas in the Pacific Northwest, but somehow failed to mention that the Salmo Priest Wilderness is located in the immediate area and, in fact, is principally located in Pend Oreille County.

Acid soil can have a detrimental effect on plant and tree growth. Our forests are already under stress from 100 years of fire suppression, increased insect infestation and rising temperatures. The effects of this acid rain may change the character of our forest and further increase the risk of fire. The long term effect may result in reduced timber health and harvest.

Pollutants in the atmosphere are predicted to have a negative impact on lichen, the primary source of food for the endangered mountain caribou, in the inland rain forest. In 3 of the last 4 years we have had to deal with weeks of smoke during the peak of tourism. Imagine having to breathe not only smoke from fire but NO_x, SO₂ and fine acidic particulates generated from this smelter. The adverse respiratory health effects are well known and will disproportionately affect outdoor workers such as loggers, builders, linemen and foresters. Hunters and outdoor recreationists will also be similarly exposed. The health effects are not confined to the respiratory system but also involve increased risk of cardiac disease and cognitive impairment, especially in the elderly. The potential impact to our tourism industry is inestimable.

Additionally the aquatic environment often bears the brunt of the impact from acid rain. At a level of pH 5, fish may die and their eggs will not hatch. Aquatic insects which the trout feed upon are sensitive at even higher pH. The Lower Priest River was once prime habitat for trout and Dolly Varden. The recovery of this cold water fishery may be substantially impaired by acid rain.

The pollution that causes acid rain can spread hundreds of miles. For this reason the US Environmental Protection Agency advises that regional, not just local, input be obtained when there is the potential for acid rain to develop as a result of industrial pollution. To this end the decision to grant a permit must be based not only on input from Pend Oreille County residents but also on the input from downwinders such as SCA, USFS, Idaho Department of Lands, and Idaho Fish and Game. Other entities appropriately should include the cities of Oldtown, Priest River, Sandpoint and Bonners Ferry, the Kootenai Nation, as well as concerned parties from Montana and British Columbia.

It is clear that the permitting of the PacWest smelter will be not only harmful to the Priest Lake/River environment but also to our resource and tourism based economy. We hold Pend Oreille County accountable to stand by its own Comprehensive Plan which says, “new development is compatible with the surrounding uses, sensitive to the surrounding areas, and retains the rural character of the community”.

We understand the urgency that the commissioners feel to find a major customer for the PUD and to provide good paying jobs for Pend Oreille County, but the PacWest smelter is not the right industry for our region for the long haul.

Board of Directors
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