

More Drilling Approved on Catface Mountain

Selkirk Merges with Imperial Metals

In August 2009, Selkirk Metals received approval for a second round of exploratory drilling for copper on Catface Mountain in Clayoquot Sound. The purpose of drilling is to determine whether it's feasible to develop the low-grade copper-molybdenum deposit (0.4% copper) into a huge open-pit mine that would remove 40% of the mountain's 880-metre south peak — one ear of the cat's face.

The exploration permit issued by B.C.'s Ministry of Mines is for 22 drill holes. Sixteen holes are to be drilled near the top of Catface and accessed by old logging roads on the north side of the mountain. The last 3 km of road re-activation will be in the steep headwaters of Bawden Creek, in a Science Panel no-logging reserve because of terrain instability. Road re-building in this reserve would not be allowed for logging purposes; unfortunately, Science Panel regulations do not apply to mining, hydro, or other industrial activities.

Another 6 holes are to be drilled lower down on the south face of the mountain and accessed by helicopter. (Last summer, Selkirk's 8 drill holes were all heli access.)

Drilling is scheduled for spring to fall 2010.

Due to the rugged terrain on Catface, Selkirk has backed out of its original plan to build new roads through old growth forest. We're particularly gratified that Selkirk dropped its proposed road over the top of Catface, a road that Friends of Clayoquot Sound stopped in 1998. At that time, it was Interfor's planned logging road.

The most worrisome development is Selkirk's merger with Vancouver-based Imperial Metals as of November 2009. Imperial is a much bigger company that currently operates 2 open-pit copper mines in BC (Huckleberry and Mt Polley), and is developing a third one (Red Chris). Imperial also owns five other mineral exploration properties in BC, and is developing a gold mine in Nevada.

A merger with Imperial is bad news: it makes continued exploration on Catface, possibly leading to a mine proposal, much more likely. Selkirk is a junior exploration company that doesn't own any mines and has run out of cash to explore its two "advanced stage" mineral properties (Catface and Ruddock). Imperial, on the other hand, has operating capital and is looking for new mines to develop to replace its Huckleberry and Mt Polley mines that will run out of ore in a few years.

Catface Mountain is one of the most contentious spots in Canada for a huge open-pit mine — in the middle of the environmentally sensitive Clayoquot Sound UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, and within sight and sound of the town of Tofino, a top tourist destination in B.C.