

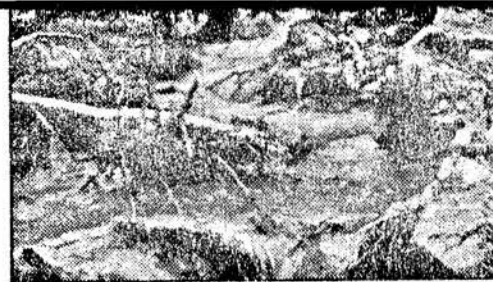
...in a telephone interview last week, Keller said he had "been looking for every angle, every bit of information" to fill in the gaps in their knowledge.

"There are still questions and answers that haven't fleshed themselves out yet" as the draft version of the permit decision circulates through an internal review of Corps personnel, he said.

The Corps is the last of three agencies in the permit process. The Bureau of Land Manage-

ment is the man with the final say on the final permit. "It is only through tribes, and those close to the tribes, that mitigation options can be identified," his Corps people wrote to members of the Indian community at the Lodgepole meeting.

Joe Azure concluded his testimony at that gathering: "The only mitigation we can offer is to leave our sacred Little Rockies alone and stop the expansions now."



"The creeks run orange forever," says Robert Gopher of the acid mine drainage. That's the color of Montana Gulch, in this photo taken in 1993 before floods washed acid water into seven drainages of the mountains. Photos by Lauran Dundee

Island Mountain Protectors, those directly responsible for initiating the lawsuit, received nothing.

In traditional Indian way, Joe Azure deferred to Ojibwa spiritual leader Robert Gopher for closing comments about the pending permit decision. Robert Gopher is the producer of "Indian Tears of Love," a video done from

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## Still active, Wings have flown together for 70 years



Leo and Isabelle Wing. Photo courtesy of Red Thunder, Inc.

**By Lauran Dundee**

Leo and Isabelle Wing, 98 and 86 years old, celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary last year. They are both full-blooded Assiniboine, and their life together on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation is entwined with the Little Rocky Mountains which are its heart.

Leo is his adoptive grandson,

Joe Azure, speaks of Leo and Isabelle and their feelings about the Zortman-Landusky gold mine and its proposed expansion. "They are very outspoken against the mine expansion," he says. "They are some of our traditional elders, who tell us stories about how our ancestors used the Little Rocky Mountains for food and wood and medicines.

"The expansion, to these old people who lived when the buffalo were still free - the way they tell stories, the expansion is like dropping a nuclear bomb on our sacred grounds."

For 18 years, tribal members have attended public hearings and spoken out about the mine's pollution of the water and air, its violation of state and federal laws, its desecration of sacred sites, and the need to stop the expansion which Pegasus Gold Corporation opposes.

The latest meeting, and the last before the final decision is made on the final permit for the expansion, was held March 3rd at the Medicine Lodge in Lodgepole, in the shadow of the mountains.

The traditional knowledge of people like the Wings was passed on to the men from the Corps of Engineers. "Spiritual leaders and traditionalists such as Virgil McConnell, Elmer Main, James Main Sr., John Allen Jr., Joe Ironman and Robert Gopher (Ojibwa Tribe),

to name a few, stood and spoke from the heart and explained about the sacredness for which not only the Gros-Ventre and Assiniboine people hold these mountains in high regards, but numerous other tribes also," she wrote. "The Little Rocky Mountains were once called 'The Island Mountains,' and many tribes sought religious refuge and power here, making visits to our mountains whenever necessary.

"Speakers told of peaks and mountain tops where fasting, vision quests and ceremonials are still held, and numerous locations where many, many natural herbs and roots having great medicinal value are found throughout the mountains. Women gave testimony as to their own spiritual wellness as a result of the bond between mother earth and the gift of life."

Main emphasized the importance of remembering "those individuals who have never stopped trying to save our mountains, water and land.

People like Catherine Halver, Gus Helgeson, Joe Azure, Virgil McConnell, Dora Helgeson, James Main Sr., Charlie Ereaux. These people began the fight to end mining in our little mountains, and never gave up. When everyone else ignored them, they continued to pursue and research ways to possibly end cyanide heap leach mining in the Island Mountains."

The meeting, Gail Main continued, was an "opportunity to see people from both tribes finally coming together to support one very important cause - saving our mountains." She was optimistic that the meeting had made a positive impact on the project manager.

Main concluded that the meeting ended on a spiritual note: "In making your decision, remember, you are our last hope. So, please do not make your decision until you consider all that you have heard and seen here tonight."