

## GET ON WITH MINE PERMITTING PROCESS

By Rep. Mike Cuffe, Montana House District 2

Let 's get on with the permitting process for the proposed Montanore Copper Mine project located a few miles south of Libby on the east side of the Cabinet Mountains.

Too often, the permitting process kills jobs. We need the system to help us create good, environmentally sound jobs.

No more delays. No more extensions. Rules can't be changed at the last minute. Goal posts can't move. Judge the project on its merits.

Above are the statements I made at the Environmental Impact Statement meeting held in Libby last week. I expressed identical thoughts to Richard Opper, director of the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, in a one on one meeting a month ago. At that time I visited his office after attending committee meetings in Helena. A rally involving hundreds of pro-mine citizens had been held in Libby the night before I visited DEQ. I reminded Opper of the high unemployment rate in Lincoln County as well as the fact we have one copper mine operating in an environmentally sound manner.

Some 20 years ago, Noranda Corporation was developing the site now proposed by Montanore. Coincidentally, my son was among those who helped blast the tunnel into the mountainside at that time, so I have been familiar with it for many years. It is a rich ore body extending beneath the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness Area. Noranda eventually abandoned it when copper prices were bottomed out, and Mines Management Inc. began to revive it five years ago. They had to begin the full permitting process over again, although they were able to use some of Noranda's fundamental information.

Streamflow degradation, power line location, and grizzly bear mitigation were among key issues raised in the EIS. The open house in Libby last week was held by the Kootenai National Forest and DEQ. Comments can be mailed to Lynn Hagarty, Kootenai National Forest, 31374 U.S. Highway 2, Libby, MT. 59923-3022. The email address is [r1\\_montanore@fs.fed.us](mailto:r1_montanore@fs.fed.us) or [degmontanoreEIS@mt.gov](mailto:degmontanoreEIS@mt.gov). Fax comments to 406-283-7709, or call 406-283-7642 for more information. Comments must be submitted by Nov. 21.