

Community Update

Kennecott Mines and Mill Town Site

June 2026

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Alaska Region

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and
Preserve



SITE BACKGROUND

The Kennecott Mines and Mill Town Site (the Site) is located in the Kennecott Mines National Historic Landmark (KNHL) within the 13.2 million-acre Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST), approximately 4 miles north of the town of McCarthy. The Site is a popular tourist destination. The Mill Town is comprised of privately owned land and public lands administered by the National Park Service (NPS). The Mill Town portion of the Site is located within the Mill Site Unit of the Kennicott Subdivision and has over 100 historic structures, including former operational structures such as the Mill Building, Leaching Plant, Power Plant, and numerous housing and support structures. Many of these structures associated with historical operations within the Mill Town are located on public lands administered by NPS.

The Kennecott mines, mill, and related facilities were developed and operated by the Kennecott Copper Corporation between 1901 and 1938. The Mill Building, and later the Leaching Plant, received and concentrated ore from several nearby mines. Today, the Mill Town primarily consists of historic buildings and other structures that were used to support the copper ore processing operations. Known types of wastes associated with structures and copper ore processing operations include lead- and arsenic-based paint, mill tailings, blasting caps, boiler ash, asbestos containing material, and petroleum-related wastes from spills.



The Kennecott Mill Town

ENVIRONMENTAL INVESTIGATIONS



*Soil screening at Bonanza
Mine*

In 2015, NPS began environmental investigations to evaluate potential risks posed to human health and the environment by contaminants at the Site and, eventually, to evaluate potential remedies to address possible identified risks. These investigations are being conducted pursuant to NPS's cleanup authority under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), also referred to as Superfund. NPS is the CERCLA lead agency at the Site, responsible for planning and directing the Site investigation and cleanup activities.

A Preliminary Assessment (PA) was conducted in 2017 and included review of historical reports and documentation as well as a site reconnaissance. Based upon the results of the PA, NPS determined that a Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) was necessary to fully characterize the nature and extent of contamination from historical operations that may pose a risk to the public and/or the environment and to evaluate alternatives for a final remedy. The first phase of field work for the RI was completed in August 2021. Four phases have been completed to date with the most recent phase concluding in August 2025.

PHASE V REMEDIAL INVESTIGATION TO BEGIN IN AUGUST 2026

From approximately August 19 to August 24, 2026, NPS contractors will collect samples from garbage dump areas and from monitoring wells installed in September 2024. Contractors will also collect samples at Jumbo Mine and in areas southeast of Bonanza Mine, as well as from Bonanza Creek and Jumbo Creek. A second mobilization is planned for approximately September 10 to September 19, 2026. During this mobilization, contractors will install additional groundwater monitoring wells using a drill rig and collect samples from the newly installed wells and

previously installed wells. Sampling during both the August and September field efforts will occur on federal lands within and outside of the Mill Town.

Phase V RI field investigation activities are being planned and implemented in close collaboration with Park staff to protect public safety. Mill Town areas and buildings that are currently open to the public will remain open during investigation activities; active work areas will be marked using safety cones, stakes, and/or caution tape, as needed. Residents and visitors are asked to not enter areas where active work is happening. Field work is expected to take several days with field personnel performing various tasks during daylight hours on both weekdays and weekends. The proposed schedule may change in response to bad weather or other unforeseen issues.

NEXT STEPS

As the remedial investigation proceeds, NPS will continue to evaluate data to understand the nature and extent of contamination at the Site. Ultimately, a Remedial Investigation Report will document the cumulative results of the multiple phases of field investigation and evaluations of the potential risks to human health and the environment posed by Site contamination.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Community involvement is an important part of the NPS CERCLA process. Information about the work so far is printed and available to read at the three locations identified below. These repositories house copies of the Site administrative record file. CERCLA administrative record files consist of those documents that will form the basis for the selection of the Site cleanup action. The administrative record file will include reports of all Site-related environmental investigations, ecological and human health risk assessments, community relations materials, public comments, and responses to significant comments, as documents become available. CERCLA administrative record files are updated periodically. Electronic copies of the documents currently in the Administrative Record File, including the Kennecott Community Involvement Plan, are available on-line on the Park's website (<https://www.nps.gov/wrst/learn/management/kennecott-mines-and-mill-town-site-environmental-investigation-project.htm>). A copy of the Kennecott Community Involvement Plan is also available at each of the information repositories; call for an appointment to review the records in person.



Groundwater sampling at Kennecott

Kennecott Mines and Mill Town Site Information Repositories

NPS Alaska Regional Office

240 W 5th Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99501
Contact: Sarah Venator
Phone: (907) 644-3573

Kennecott Visitor Center

Blackburn School
Kennecott, AK 99588
Phone: (907) 205-7106

WRST Park Headquarters

Mile 106.8 Richardson Highway
Copper Center, AK 99573-0439
Contact: Benjamin Pister
Phone: (907) 822-7212

LEAD UPDATE

In 2024, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) issued updated guidance on soil lead levels for CERCLA sites. The residential soil lead screening level was lowered from 400 milligrams per kilogram (mg/kg) to 100 mg/kg for sites like residential areas of the Kennecott Mines and Mill Town Site. A screening level is a generic risk-based concentration intended for use in evaluating whether further investigation or cleanup may be warranted. Residents are encouraged to learn more about lead, potential health effects from lead, and preventative measures to limit exposure to lead on buildings or in soil where lead-based paint was used historically. The USEPA offers information regarding lead and lead exposure, including strategies for maintaining lead-safe environments within homes (<https://www.epa.gov/lead/learn-about-lead>).

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

If you have questions concerning the information contained in this Community Update, please contact Sarah Venator, NPS Contaminated Site Project Manager, via email at sarah_venator@nps.gov, or Jonathan Shafer, NPS Park Contact, via email at jonathan_shafer@nps.gov.