

# CINNABAR

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## FOUNDATION

### Cinnabar Foundation Grantees Focus on Smith River Mine

Two of The Cinnabar Foundation's 2015 grantees, **Montana Trout Unlimited** and the **Montana Environmental Information Center**, are collaborating on campaigns to inform the public about potential environmental threats to Montana's Smith River as a result of a proposed mine.

Montana's Smith River is renowned for its spectacular scenery, towering limestone canyons, and blue-ribbon trout fishery. It originates high in the Castle Mountains of central Montana, and flows through remote canyons before it empties into the Missouri River about 10 miles downstream of Great Falls.

A small Canadian mining start-up, *Tintina Resources*, is investigating the feasibility of a massive underground copper mine at the headwaters of the Smith River, on the banks of Sheep Creek. *Tintina* recently partnered with Australian-based *Sandfire Resources* to develop the project. *Tintina* has signaled that it is interested in applying for a full-scale mine operating permit from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, sometime in late 2015. The mine would drop below the water table, and *Tintina* would have to pump water out of the mine to keep it from flooding. The pumped wastewater would contain arsenic and other toxics. *Tintina's* proposed copper mine is particularly concerning because it will mine through sulfide minerals, which when exposed to air and water can react to form sulfuric acid in a process known as acid mine drainage.

The Smith is Montana's only permitted, limited access river due to the exceptional public demand to experience its fishing and recreational opportunities. And, it's an important economic engine—generating upwards of \$10 million in annual revenue from these activities. A portion of the river is managed as a State Park, featuring an incredible 59-mile stretch of river with only one put-in and one take-out point.

The Smith River and its tributaries provide crucial habitat and spawning grounds for regional trout fisheries. The Sheep Creek drainage accounts for over half of tributary spawning of rainbow trout in the Smith River drainage, and rainbow trout have been known to travel nearly 200 miles round-trip from the Missouri River to spawn!

Montana has a long legacy of mining projects that have contaminated its rivers and streams. To learn more about this potential threat and to watch the video, *Smith River Memories*, visit:

<http://www.saveoursmith.com>

(Sponsored by Montana Environmental Information Center)

<http://www.smithriverwatch.org>

(Sponsored by Montana Trout Unlimited)

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Information for this project/issue brief was excerpted from the Montana Environmental Information Center's *Save Our Smith* website.

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