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BLACKFOOT RIVER

MINING COMPANY COURTS LOCALS



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An overhead view of the Sentinel Metals property where the company is performing exploratory drilling outside Lincoln on Tuesday.

Sentinel Metals plan gets mixed reaction from residents in Lincoln, haunted by history

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LINCOLN – Company officials hoping to develop a gold and silver mine near the Blackfoot River have embarked on a charm offensive in the nearby town, aiming to overcome the industry’s environmentally checkered history in the region.

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality in March issued a draft environmental permit for Australia-based Sentinel Metals to conduct exploratory drilling on private land east of Lincoln. A public comment period for the proposed project ends April 17.

At the Lincoln Community Center on Tuesday evening, a

handful of company representatives held an “open house” for local residents, chatting with dozens of people at tables displaying aspects of Sentinel’s near-term plans for their Columbia Gold Project. It’s the sole project for the company, which went public on the Australian Securities Exchange last year. Postcards advertising the meeting were sent to every resident in the zip code, according to Sentinel officials.

“This area has had a really checkered past, and we’re the first to recognize the impact of Zortman-Landusky, the Mike Horse incident,” Sentinel CEO Matt Herbert said. “For a lot of people there’s not going to be a lot

of changing opinions, and that’s fine. What we do want is for people to understand the project.”

The shuttered mine near Zortman, on the edge of the Fort Belknap Reservation, remains a stark reminder of the risks that past gold mining practices entailed. Following two decades of activity, the mining company’s 1998 bankruptcy left the state on the hook for cleanup and water treatment expected to extend into perpetuity.

But it was the catastrophic spill of mining waste from the former Mike Horse mining site that still feels fresh in the minds of many Lincoln residents. The

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Simon Dahrouge, executive director of Sentinel Metals, shows a map referencing the distance between Lincoln and the drill site on Tuesday.

Lawyers eye one suit on 2 sex laws

Motion asks to fold suits on 2023, ’25 bills into one

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Lawyers for transgender and intersex individuals hope to settle once and for all whether Montana Republican officials’ repeated attempts to legally define sex as binary pass constitutional muster.

They filed a motion on Monday asking a Missoula County district court judge for permission to bundle two legal challenges against a pair of separate but almost identical measures passed through the last two Legislatures and signed into law by the GOP governor.

Senate Bill 437 created definitions for sex based on reproductive systems. It mimicked a bill from 2023 that had already been blocked by two separate judges by the time it was making its way through the 2025 Legislature.

Though it passed without much trouble through both Republican-led chambers, SB 437 collected dust for nearly a year before Gov. Greg Gianforte, also a Republican, signed it into law last month.

GOP leadership hoped that holding the bill would keep it from getting ensnared in ongoing litigation against its predecessor – the exact legal strategy Helena-based Upper Seven Law hopes to employ with the motion it filed on Monday.

Attorneys for the plaintiff asked Judge Leslie Halligan, the same judge that struck down the 2023 legislation, to tack the complaint against SB 437 onto the existing lawsuit, and to block the recently enacted law from being enforced while litigation plays out.

“After this Court determined that Senate Bill 458 (“SB 458”) – the State’s previous discriminatory attempt to define “sex” – violated the Montana Constitution, the 2025 Montana State Legislature passed Senate Bill 437 (“SB 437”) using the same ‘mechanics’ as SB

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St. Mary water system repair hits milestone

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A repair job on infrastructure supplying some 18,000 people in northern Montana with water reached a major milestone this week.

Two siphons carrying water for the St. Mary Diversion Dam and Canal system, which supplies the Milk River with the majority of its waterflow, officially came online Tuesday. The announcement that the siphons at St. Mary and Halls Coulee were complete marked the culmination of a massive effort to restore the Hi-Line’s water supply after a catastrophic failure in 2024.

The failure flooded portions of the nearby town of Babb, prompted a mobilization of state, federal and tribal engineers and instigated water restrictions for Milk River stakeholders from the Blackfoot Indian Reservation east all the way to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation.

“We’re coming online,” said Jennifer Patrick, project manager for the Milk River Joint Board of Control. “But still, we’re playing catch up from the past two years without water.”

The St. Mary River begins in Glacier National Park. When it reaches Babb, on the Blackfoot Indian Reservation, it flows into the St. Mary Dam. Water flows through two 29-mile pipes,

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