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### An Analysis of Community and Stakeholder Participation in an Environmental Conflict: The Controversial Proposed Black Butte Copper Project, Smith River Basin

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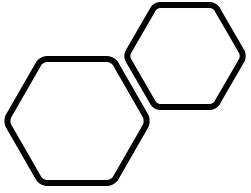
*The Black Butte Copper Project  
and the Smith River: a change in  
the legacy of mining in the West*

By:

Eliza Adele Maleski

Advisor: Dr. Sarah J. Halvorson

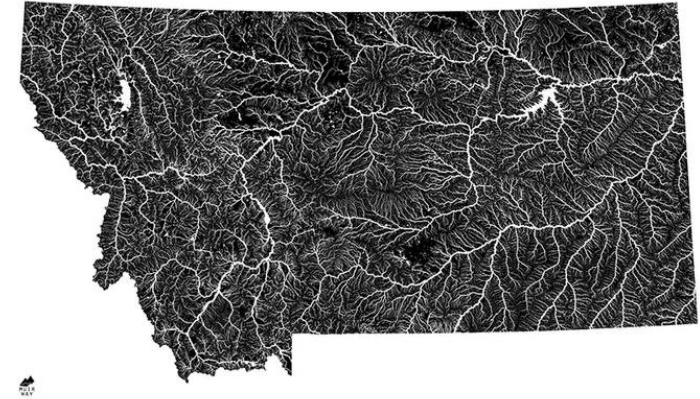
April 22, 2022



- Proposed copper mine,
- Culturally valued river basin
- Local community working to balance inevitable change



THE STATE OF MONTANA HYDROLOGICAL MAP  
WATERWAYS BASED ON STEADLER STREAM ORDER



Research Questions and Purpose

Study Area: Meagher County, MT

Wicked Problems

Methodology

Findings

Discussion and Conclusion

# Research Questions

- How does the controversy surrounding the Black Butte Copper Project in Meagher County, MT represent a Wicked Problem?
- How are stakeholders adding to the complexity of the conflict?
- What is the role of the Meagher County Stewardship Council in the conflict?





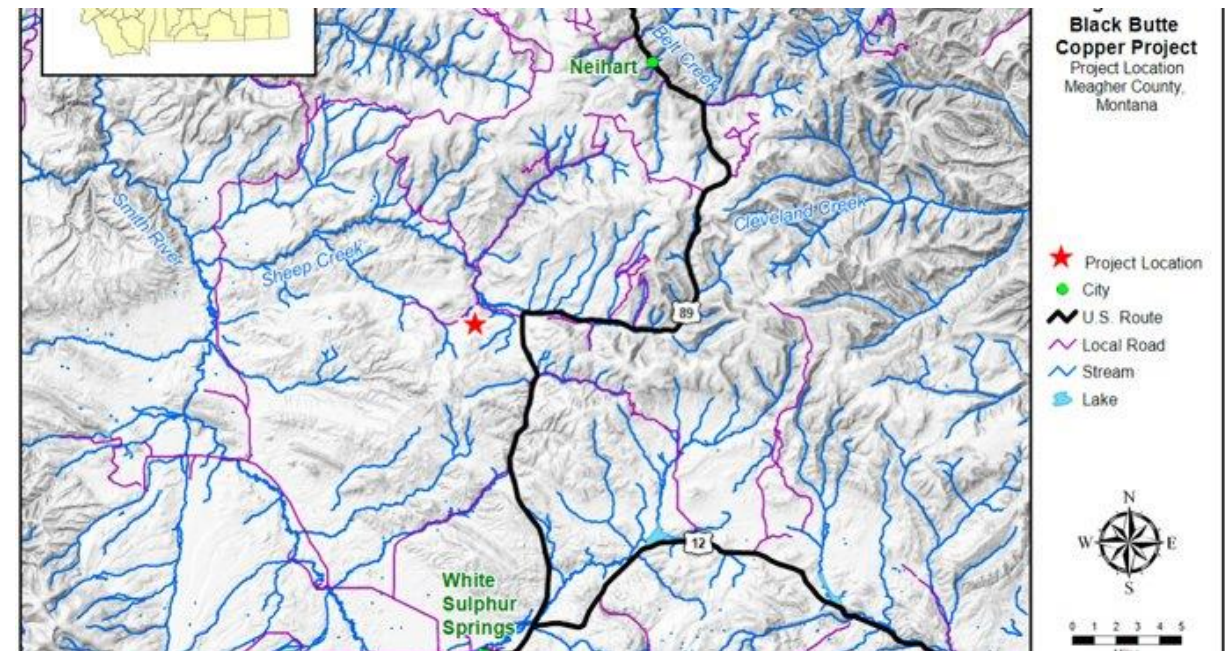
## Copper

- Necessary for renewable energy development
- Wind Turbine: 4.7 tons
- Solar Panel: 5.5 tons/megawatt
- 100% recyclable

## Johnny Lee Deposit

- Discovered in 1985 in **Meagher County, MT**
- Average concentration: 3.04%
- 14.5 million tons = 3,085,106.38 turbines or 2,636,363.64 megawatts

A LOT of energy



# Study Area: Meagher County, Montana

- Population 1,964
- Area: 2,364 mi<sup>2</sup>
- County Seat: White Sulphur Springs

## Economy

- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting, Retail, Service,
- Transportation, Educational Services

Home to the Smith River

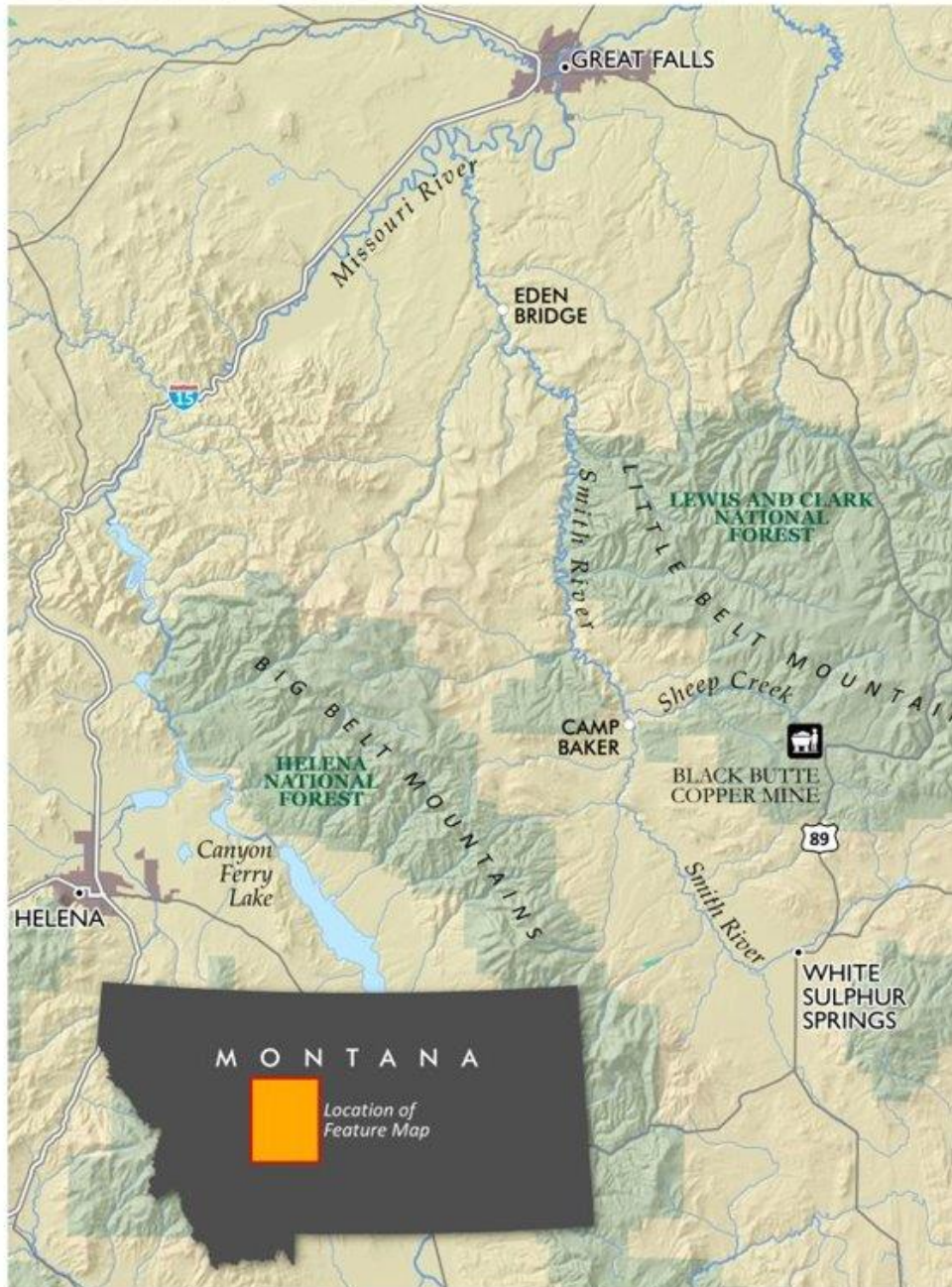




# Study Area: Smith River Basin and State Park

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- Tributary of the Missouri River
- Trout habitat
- Recreational opportunities
- Agricultural lifeline
- Montana's only permitted river
- 1989 protected under Smith River management act
- Significant cultural resource





# Conflict

- Lawsuit filed in 2021 by American Rivers, Trout Unlimited, Montana Trout Unlimited, Montana Environmental Information Center and Earthworks over Montanan's *"right to a healthful environment"* based on the mine's threats to the Smith River watershed.
- Copper is becoming necessary to our daily lives

# Methodology

- Literature Review on Wicked Problems and Stakeholders
- Survey of Public Documents and media surrounding the conflict.
- Attendance of an MCSC monthly meeting on April 6th, 6pm via zoom
- Key Informant Interviews
  - Bill Bryan (MCSC Consultant)
  - Jackson Rose (MCSC ED)
  - Nancy Schlepp (VP of Communication, Sandfire Resources)
  - Scott Bosse (Northern Rockies Director, American Rivers)

The purpose of this study is to assess an environmental conflict as a Wicked Problem and analyze the involvement of a community group's response

# Wicked Problems

According to Tom Ritchey of the Swedish Morphological Society;  
Wicked problems are:

- "ill-defined, ambiguous and associated with **strong moral, political and professional issues.**"
- "they are strongly **stakeholder dependent**, there is often little consensus about what the problem is, let alone how to deal with it"
- "they are sets of complex, interacting issues **evolving** in a dynamic social context."

Stakeholder: *an individual or group that can affect or is affected by the accomplishment of organizational purpose.*



# Findings: Stakeholder dependent

## Complex Network of Stakeholders

- **Basin Scale** (irrigators, farmers, ranchers, tourists, floaters, hunters/fishers)
- **County Scale** (MCSC, Local government in White Sulphur Springs)
- **State Scale** (DEQ, Governor's office, MEIC, American Rivers Northern Rockies Office, Montana Trout Unlimited)
- **Nationwide Scale** (American Rivers, Trout Unlimited, EarthWorks)

# Moral, Political and Professional issue


Moral conflict for the public

Political conflict for Montana Government

Professional conflict across the broad range of stakeholders

\*Causes social paralysis

# "Evolving in a socially dynamic context"



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## The Battle for the Soul of Montana

**A copper mine threatens the iconic Smith River. It will bring jobs and the copper needed for a renewable-energy future, but is it worth the risk to one of the last pristine waterways?**



By

CASSIDY RANDALL

APRIL 15, 2021

**G**eologist Jerry Zieg grew up next to the Smith River in central **Montana**, on the ranch his family has owned for five generations. The river irrigated their land. He learned to fish from its pristine bounty of westslope cutthroat trout. The river's russet canyon walls, with 1,000-year-old pictographs drawn by the Besant and Avonlea peoples, were what first inspired his fascination with geology. Later, when he married his wife, the two floated the Smith for their honeymoon. "My family sold the part

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## State will appeal Black Butte mine decision

By TOM KUGLIN Lee Newspapers Apr 12, 2022

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for school board.

Vote by May 3rd

Paid for by Montanans Organized for Education PAC.  
Treasurer Maffie Funk, P.O. Box 977, Helena, MT 59624

# Meagher County Stewardship Council



- Community group put together by Nancy Schlepp with funding from Sandfire Resources to act as the voice of the public in the mine development process.
- Adapted in collaboration with Bill Bryan (One MT) to incorporate community leaders with differing perspectives to facilitate change in White Sulphur Springs.
- 60% residents of Meagher County, 40% external members.





# Discussion and Conclusion

# Acknowledgements