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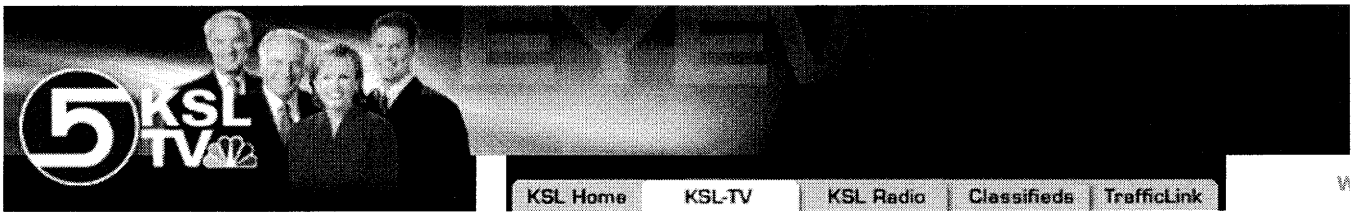

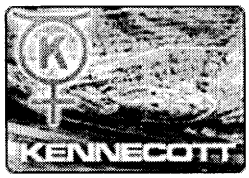

Future of Kennecott Being Questioned

Oct. 21, 2003

John Hollenhorst Reporting

After a century as one of Utah's biggest and most visible employers the era of Kennecott Copper, seems to be drawing to a close.

The world's biggest man-made hole still has at least a decade of life. But some say a vital question needs to be answered soon: What will be left of the landscape once the miners are gone?

This hole in Salt Lake County is so big astronauts see it from space. And it draws a crowd from round the world.

Phyllis Corn, Israeli Tourist: "There are some spectacular things in Israel, but nothing to compare to this."

But the ore deposit that provided more riches than any other mine in history is nearly tapped out. Kennecott bosses have studied going after the roots of the deposit by shifting to underground mining, but drastically low copper prices makes that a huge financial risk.

Bill Champion, President, Kennecott Utah Copper: "Well it's something north of a billion dollars for capital costs."

Going underground now seems unlikely, barring a major change in the copper market. Instead Kennecott plans to slightly enlarge the open pit and improve efficiency to extend the life of the mine.

Bill Champion, President, Kennecott Utah Copper: "Roughly it's ten years right now. So the current program that we're engaged with might extend that to 15 years or perhaps beyond."

Which raises a question some state officials and even tourists are starting to wonder about.

Martine Prevot, French Tourist: "The landscape, it's quite modified. And how will it be really afterward?"

In other words, when the party's over what reclamation work will Kennecott do to straighten up? The state has never required Kennecott to submit a detailed plan or to post enough bonds to assure completion. The company does have an ongoing reclamation program, but isn't ready to talk about the post-closure era. Bill Champion, President, Kennecott Utah Copper: "I think it's too early to talk about reclamation plans."

Kennecott has already recontoured and revegetated some wasterock-dumps. It's part of an

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area-wide 350 million dollar reclamation project. But a big question is, what happens to the wasterock dumps which are much higher and steeper?

No one knows if the slopes will be left as they are. No one knows if the giant open-pit will fill up with contaminated water, or if Kennecott will clean up the water and put it to use. Kennecott officials promise a plan, eventually, and the money to carry it out. But they resist being pinned down.

Bill Champion, President, Kennecott Utah Copper: "If we try to commit today to specifically what we're doing to do with these dumps and we find out 10 or 15 or 20 years from now when we shut the place down that there are better methods to be able to reclaim, then we certainly want to have the ability to use those methods."

Some tourists suggest leaving things the way they are as a monument. In fact, the mine is a National Historic Site, which some people worry will complicate or limit reclamation.

Kennecott will present its annual report on reclamation work Wednesday morning to the Utah Board of Oil, Gas and Mining.

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