



(Adella Harding/Free Press)

Independence Mining Co. and the Bureau of Land Management formalized a land swap yesterday. From left are: Robert Micsak, vice president, general counsel and chief environmental officer for IMC; Helen Hankins, Elko BLM district manager; Jerry Bateman, IMC land manager; and Dave Vandenberg, manager of non-renewable resources for the Elko BLM office.

Swap of IMC, public land finalized yesterday by BLM

By Adella Harding

Independence Mining Co. and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management made their Marys River land exchange official yesterday in an informal meeting at the BLM office in Elko, where IMC picked up patents for 14,283 acres.

In return, the company turned over to the public the title to 4,132 acres in the Marys River watershed to help federal agencies with the Marys River Riparian/Aquatic Habitat Management Plan and the Lahontan Cutthroat Trout Recovery Plan.

"There is a net decrease of 10,000 acres of public land in Elko County, but they were appraised at approximately the same value," said Helen Hankins, director of the BLM's Elko district.

The private land was part of the Hawks Ranch 30 miles north of Death and was appraised at \$1,013,000, while the public land to be swapped was valued at \$961,000, said Dave Vandenberg, manager of non-renewable resources for the Elko BLM office.

The acres acquired by IMC include the mill site at Jerritt Canyon north of Elko, a tailings pond and a "mixed bag" of parcels "to make forest lands more accessible," said Robert Micsak, vice president, general counsel and chief environmental officer for Independence.

Most of IMC's operations are in the Humboldt National Forest and fall under the U.S. Forest Service, however, the lower lands include BLM-managed lands.

The 14,283 acres also includes 3,200 acres in Ruby Valley that IMC expects to hold for future exchange possibilities, Micsak said.

BLM considers the exchange a good deal because the newly acquired land allows the agency to consolidate management in the Marys River watershed, including Lahontan cutthroat trout habitat, Hankins said.

The acquisition will help the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's recovery effort for the trout and "contribute to the delisting of the fish," she said.

The delisting from threatened species would benefit everyone, including ranchers, public land managers and mining companies, Micsak said. Headwaters of the Marys River "still has the potential for a viable population" of the Lahontans, said BLM biologist Roy Rice, who said the BLM is "doing its darnedest to get" the fish delisted.

Rice also said the Humboldt River Basin has the best chance of delisting of the Lahontan.

The public is also gaining riparian habitat along the tributaries and main stem of Marys River and is receiving an additional 538-acre conservation easement from IMC, Hankins said.

The exchange has been near three years in the making. The initial paperwork was filed in 1992 and a formal proposal in November 1993. An environmental impact statement covering the proposed swap was released in April, 1995.

IMC purchased the Hawks Ranch with a trade-in mind and is exchanging

a chunk of the ranch for the patents. Micsak said most of the remainder of the ranch was sold to a neighboring ranch, but IMC still owns some in the Jarbidge Wilderness.

"We have not determined what we will do with that parcel," he said.

The land swap cancels out the certificates IMC already had on file with the Department of Interior for patenting the mill site under the 1872 Mining Law. Under that law, mines can acquire an acre for \$2.50 or \$5, depending on whether the land is for facilities or mining. And the practice has drawn national criticism.

"Instead the public got fair market value for the land," Micsak said.

Early protests to the exchange came from ranchers concerned about grazing access; and Jerry Bateman, IMC's land manager, said the company offered grazing to all seven permittees involved. Only one rancher refused. A.G. Edwards Jr. of Wilton Center, N.H., the absentee owner of Saval Ranching Co., objected.

"The net impact is zero except for Edwards," Hankins said, adding that IMC made the grazing offers well before the land exchange was final as a good neighbor.

The five pieces of land Independence acquired are called the Doby George Parcel northwest of the mill, the Millsite Parcel, the Water Pipe Canyon Parcel to the southwest of the mill, the T Creek Parcel near the offered lands in the Marys River drainage and the Ruby Valley Parcel east of Franklin Lake.