

10-year-old girl stands up for Orogrande mine

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Caitlyn Larson, 10, looks around the entrance of the Cinco de Mayo mine in Orogrande, N.M., in this June 2011 photo, spotting signs of owl habitation in the rocks. She took on a campaign to save the mountain from being stripped for iron ore because of her concerns for the local wildlife and history of the area. Photo: Alamogordo Daily News, Elva K. Osterreich / AP

OROGRANDE, N.M. (AP) — When 10-year-old [Caitlyn Larson](#) and her family heard there was activity and large equipment moving near the old [Cinco de Mayo](#) mine in the Jarilla Mountains, they became concerned.

"(People) told us someone tore a big hole into the Cinco de Mayo," Caitlyn said.

As the family drove out to see it for themselves and take a hike in the area, the Larsons saw the landscape they knew had changed. Roads had been widened and pathways expanded, leaving many plants torn up and burms in the way of regular roadways.

Large-scale mine-related equipment sat at the bottom of the mountain containing the Cinco de Mayo, Iron Duke, Barbara and Virginia mining claims.

The Larsons found, according to a press release issued by the [Iron Mining Group](#), the company is purchasing 180,000 metric tons of iron ore from [OroGrande Iron Ore Co.](#), LLC. The first delivery of 60,000 metric tons is to be made to IMG by July 31.

According to the press release, the group also plans to take 5.98 million metric tons of iron ore from the area over the next three years.

The release also says the low-grade iron ore, once extracted, will be taken by train to Sonora, Mexico, where it will then be shipped to China.

Caitlyn, seeing the machines and the changes in the landscape, became concerned for the plants, wildlife and history of the area. Not only have many varieties of plants, including rare cactus, been disturbed by the activity at the mine, but a couple of golden eagle nests are situated in the area.

"Eagles, owl, bighorn sheep and mountain lions have been seen in this area," said [Guy Larson](#), Caitlyn's father. "It's amazing what's up here."

The Larsons are a mining family and want to make it clear they are not against mining, Guy said.

"We just want to see everything considered," Guy said. "What about the history? What are they going to do about the eagles?"

At the very least, Guy said, the mining company is required to have its permit posted at the site.

Orogrande was a bustling mining community in 1915 when the mines in question were active, Guy said. There were three bustling towns in the area at the time Orogrande, Brice and Oyasi.

Caitlyn's concern about the wildlife and history turned her into an activist. She created a press release and sent letters to the [Bureau of Land Management](#), President [Barack Obama](#), Gov. [Susana Martinez](#) and others.

"If the destruction created in the last seven days is any indication of the work they plan to do in the next 90 days (and possibly the next three years, as reported by IMG), there will be no mountains left," Caitlyn wrote June 6 in her release. "They will have been completely destroyed, pulverized and sent to China."

Caitlyn, with the help of her family, created a Facebook group called "Save.our.Mountains," as well as an online petition to save the mountain.

Caitlyn's efforts got the attention of the BLM, which went out to check on the matter.

Bill Childress, district manager of the Las Cruces BLM office, said they found BLM roads had been modified without proper permission and ordered the mining company to stop.

"We had an issue where the road was graded," Childress said. "We informed them to get a proper right-of-way permit."

Childress explained most BLM-maintained roads are open to general public access, but permission must be obtained to modify the roads.

Chuck Thomas, director of the [New Mexico Mining and Mineral Division](#) in Santa Fe, said all mining proposals in the state must go through his office for permitting.

"The work they are doing is not permitted," Thomas said.

Thomas said the Mining and Mineral Division processes proposed permits for mining activity in New Mexico. The permit request must show they have access to property and mineral rights.

There are two types of permits: a minimal impact permit, which is for areas less than 10 acres, and a permit for regular impact areas. The minimal impact permit takes 30 to 60 days to process, Thomas said.

"We are an umbrella division," he said. "They have to have all the pieces in place that involve any of the agencies that would have an interest in evaluating the project."

The mining project, Thomas said, appears to be on BLM and state land. The energy department would have to do an air quality study. Game and Fish has to come in and look at endangered species. The history of the area has to be considered. Public hearings must be held and, finally, the company must have a plan for reclaiming the natural state of the area and the financial ability to do so.

Also, for the regular impact area permits, the organization must have a baseline sampling plan. That in itself can take a year to complete, Thomas said.

"We are very concerned," Thomas said about the IMG project. "We would like for them to get their permitting process in so we can get this evaluation started."

Thomas' division will issue a cessation order to cease activity and move all equipment off the property until the permit process is completed, he said.

IMG vice president Michael Carney called the failure to obtain the proper permits a "misunderstanding."

The company did not respond further to inquiries.

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