

## **Kennecott studies expansion at Bingham Canyon**

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TORONTO (miningweekly.com) – Rio Tinto subsidiary Kennecott Utah Copper is looking at a project to extend the life of its Bingham Canyon Mine, in Utah, to 2028, and will also look at further extensions that could mean the mine is still operating in 30 years, the firm said on Monday.

Kennecott is the second-biggest copper miner in the US and Bingham Canyon accounts for almost 25% of the total US refined copper production.

The mine has produced 18,7-million tons of copper in more than a century of operation, and also produces gold, silver and molybdenum.

Under current plans, the operation would have ended production in 2021, with production declines beginning about five years before then.

The expansion, dubbed the Cornerstone project, would enable the mine to continue producing at current levels, but will require a number of permitting approvals, as well as the go-ahead from the Rio board.

The entire permit review and approval process will likely take two to three years, and Kennecott is already going on the offensive to secure public support for the expansion.

In fact, the statement announcing the project on Monday seemed more focused on emphasising the importance of the Bingham County mine to the local economy than on the details of the expansion itself.

Kennecott cited figures from a study by the University of Utah's Bureau of Economic and Business Research department (BEBR) and even quoted a senior BEBR economist in support of the expansion.

It did reveal, though, that the Cornerstone project entails pushing back the south wall of the mine about 1 000 feet and deepening the mine about 300 feet to reach 700-million tons of ore resource.

The shape of the pit will remain about the same, but will get wider on the southeast side and deeper at the bottom, the firm said.

This will require increasing the size of the pit's fleet of large haul trucks over time, adding an in-pit crusher and another grinding line and supporting equipment at the Copperton concentrator.

Kennecott will also need to generate or buy another 100 MW of electricity to power these improvements, and more tailings will be created.

The company will need to update a number of existing air, water and land permits in order to allow it to move and crush more rock and store more tailings to produce the same amount of copper.

Of the 70 primary environmental permits that Kennecott Utah Copper operates under, roughly 25 will require an update to allow the Cornerstone project investment in the mine, concentrator, power plant and tailings impoundment.

The refinery and smelter are big enough and will not need any permit updates.

In 2009, Kennecott produced about 300 000 t of copper, 500 000 oz of gold, four-million ounces of silver, 25-million pounds of molybdenum, and 1,1-million tons of sulfuric acid, a by-product of the smelting process.

Rio Tinto bought the Bingham Canyon Mine and related facilities in 1989.

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