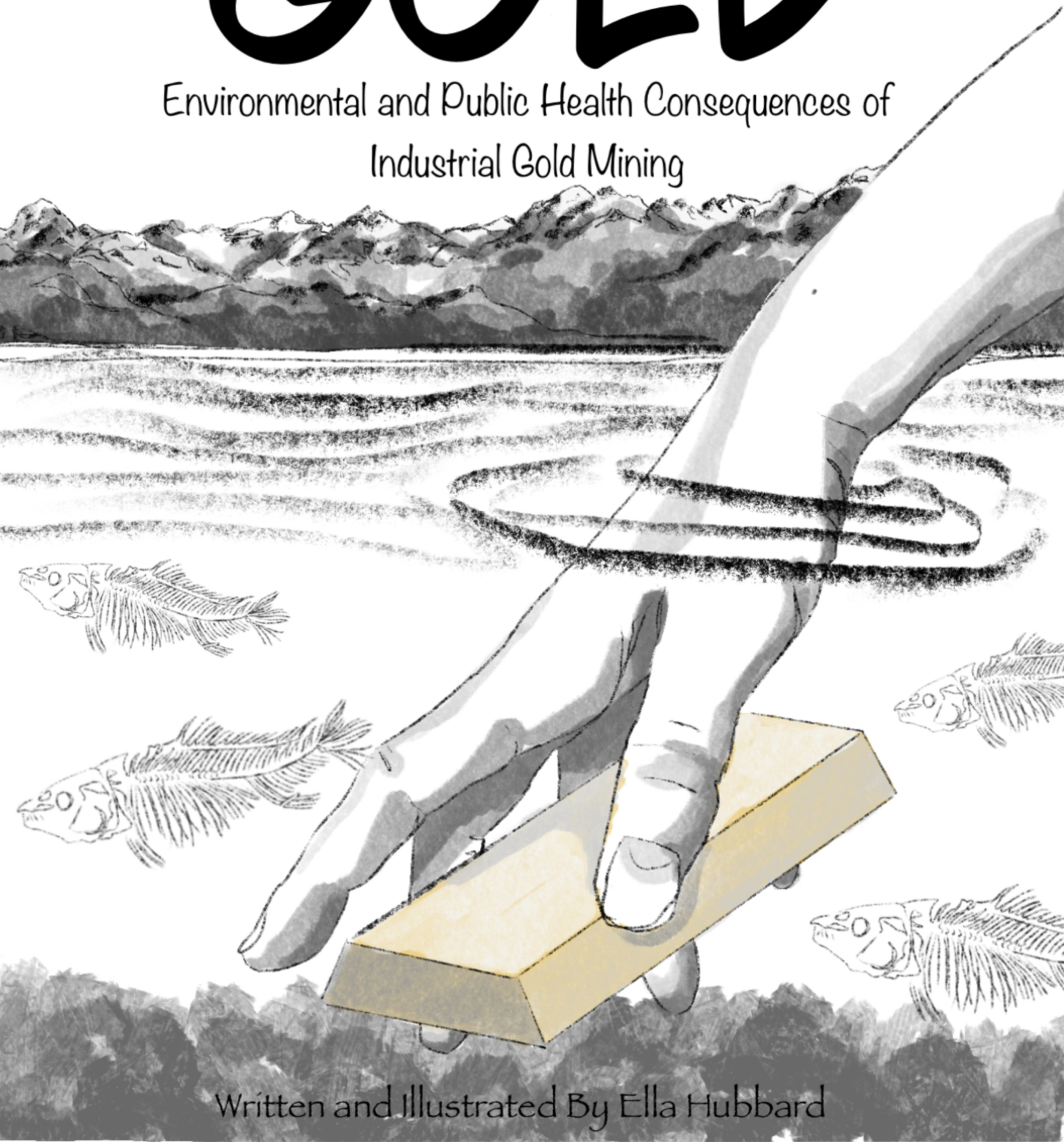


The Cost of **GOLD**

Environmental and Public Health Consequences of
Industrial Gold Mining



Written and Illustrated By Ella Hubbard

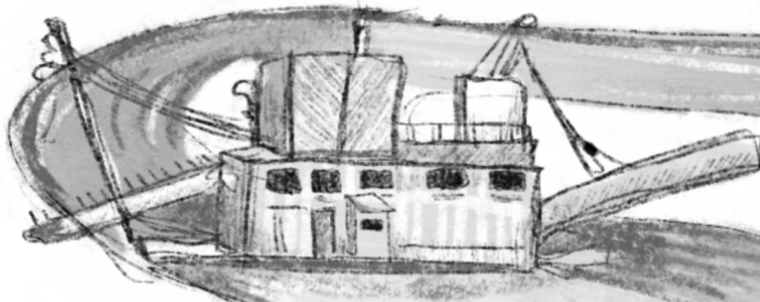
GOLD FEVER

Gold mining has been a defining characteristic of the Alaskan identity since the first colonizers arrived in the region. But the romanticized image is no longer the reality of the industry. Enormous projects are backed by mostly foreign companies with distant investors and inadequate governmental oversight or regulation. The mining industry has grown to have cascading, catastrophic effects on local ecosystems and communities' way of life.



There is no tangible community benefit to justify new industrial gold mining. Read this zine to learn about the industry's environmental & public health consequences.

Despite claims that we do it best, **Alaska's mining regulations fall short** of the standards other mining states like Nevada, Minnesota, and Arizona have long had in place.



While mining corporations are allowed to cut corners on safeguards, our royalties and tax structures enable these corporations to **compensate Alaskans less** for our mineral resources than other state.

Let's dig in!

THE DIRTY SIDE OF GOLD

Today's gold mining industry has evolved to leave a colossal footprint. Open pit mines are the industry standard for modern gold mining. Explosives create canyons with excavations as far as 2.5 miles deep. Large-scale mines permanently alter the landscape, use huge amounts of water in the mining process, and leach heavy metals and sulfuric acid into the watershed.

The mining industry is the largest producer of toxic chemical releases in Alaska. Gold mining produces three million times more waste than gold.



One wedding band can create as much as

20 TONS

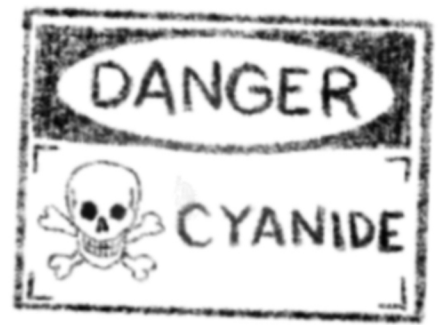


of waste rock. That's like generating a fire truck's weight in waste to make one wedding band.

One pound of gold requires 32,000 gallons of water to produce. That's enough water for one person to drink for 87 years.



The waste rock itself is not benign, unearthing it **exposes sulfuric acid and heavy metals to the watershed and air.**



The process of separating gold from waste rock involves crushing and using incredibly deadly chemicals like cyanide which creates a liquid toxic waste, or 'tailings'. This toxic slurry is stored behind massive dams that must stand forever. A minor or major tailing dam failure is not uncommon and has catastrophic consequences, including floods as well as waterway and drinking water contamination.

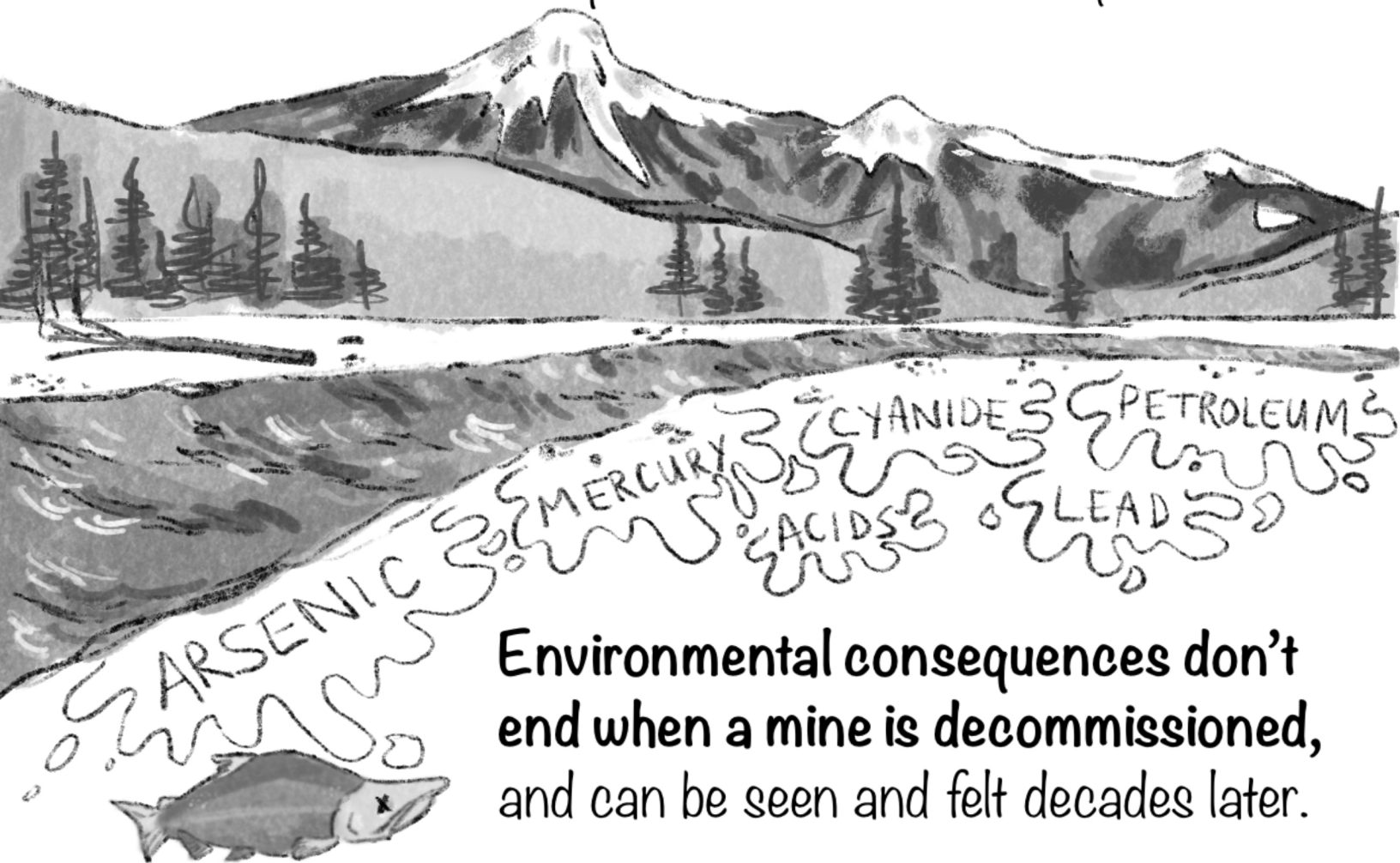
There is often no budget for perpetual monitoring and maintenance of abandoned mine infrastructure. Trading clean water and healthy habitat for a non-essential resource which has such long lasting effects is a bad deal.



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

As Alaskans, we rely on our lands and waters for our salmon, moose, berries, and more. Fishing, hunting, gathering, and outdoor recreation keep our hearts and bellies full. Gold mines overburden our ecosystems, threatening our foodweb and our livelihoods.

- Mine runoff acidifies streams, making them uninhabitable to salmon
- Heavy metals accumulate in the food chain causing long term health effects to people and animals
- Noise pollution from industrial traffic disrupts wildlife
- Industrial water consumption dries streams & aquifers



Environmental consequences don't end when a mine is decommissioned, and can be seen and felt decades later.

A study conducted in 2020 on the impacts track record of five Alaska metal mines revealed that:



100% – All five mines have experienced **at least one major spill or major accidental release** of hazardous materials.

Of them, two located on public lands contaminated areas designated as National Monuments.

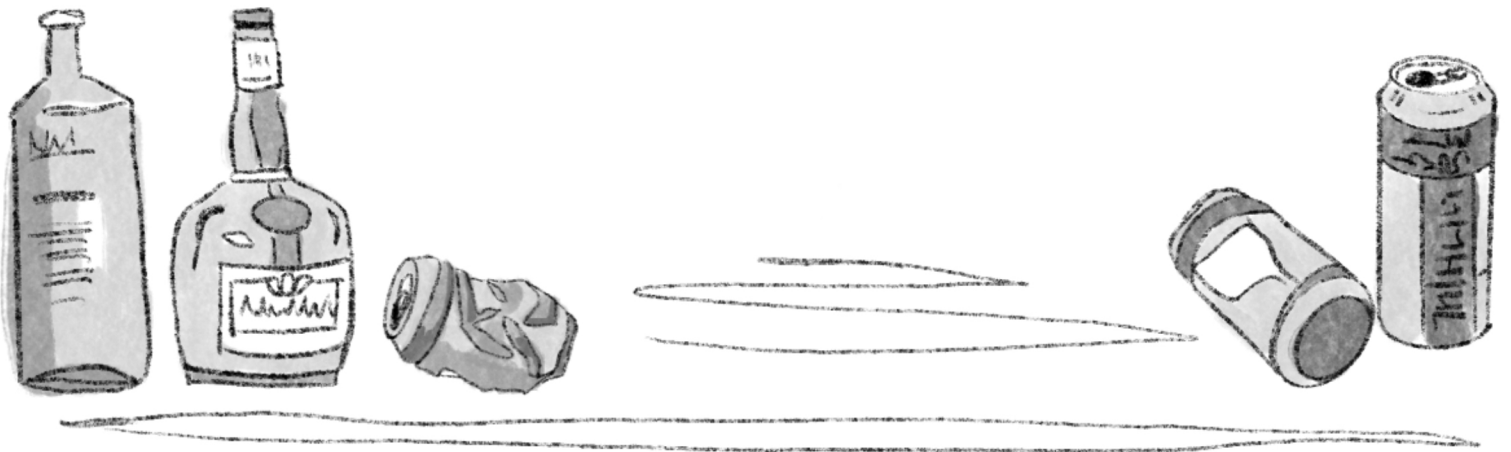
80% – Four of the five mines failed to capture or control contaminated mine water.

80% – Four out of five mines have been identified by the EPA as out of compliance with federal laws to protect clean air or water in the last three years and were found to have underestimated water quality impacts in their Environmental Impact Statements during permitting.

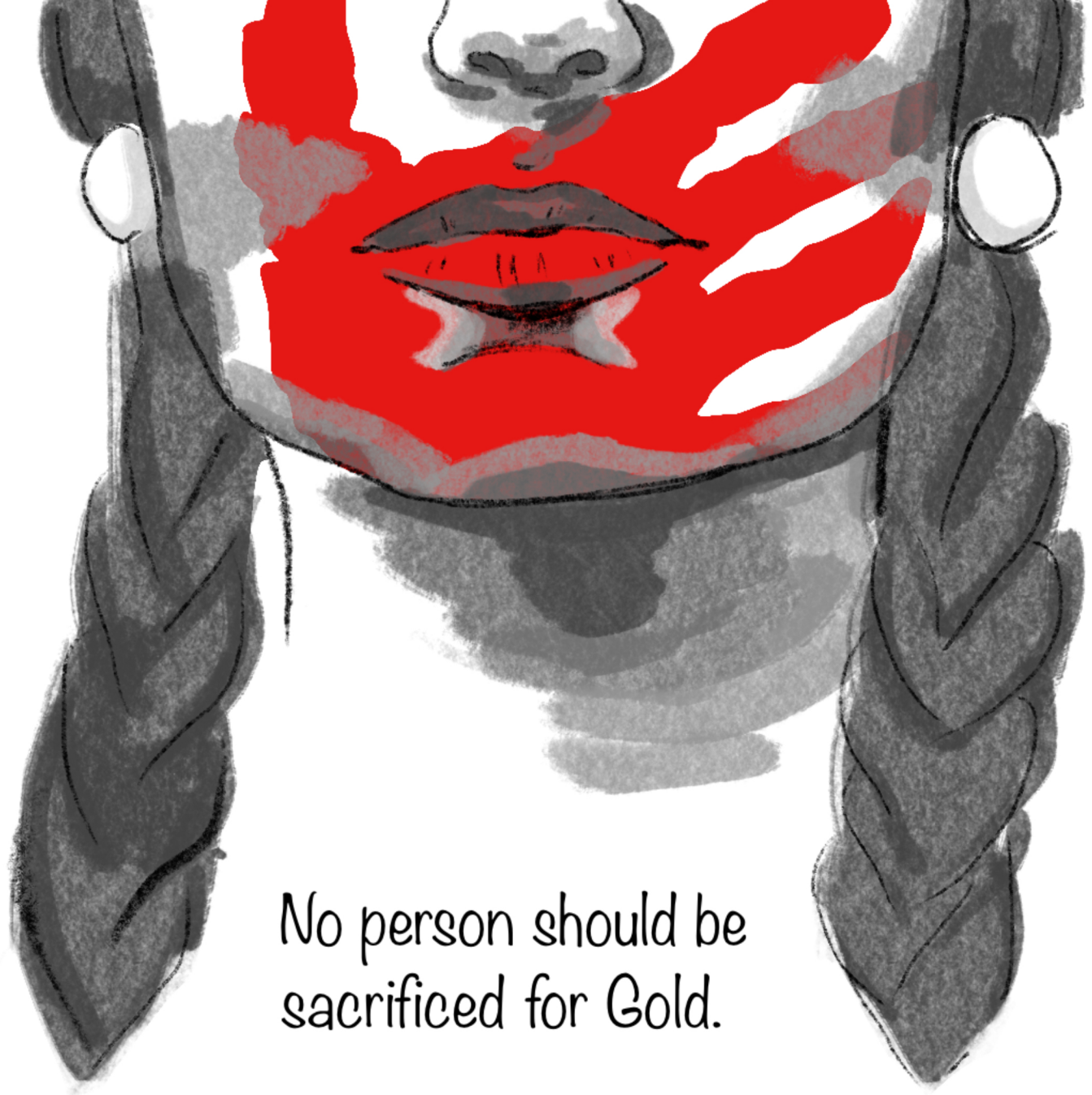


COMMUNITY CONSEQUENCE

Gold mining cuts through the heart of communities. The tension between the prospect of temporary economic opportunity and the threat of losing traditional wild foods pits the people living near proposed mine sites against each other. While mining companies often try to buy public support with community sponsorship, giveaways, and the promise of better economic outlook, these communities have much to lose.



The arrival of a mine often leads to higher rates of drug and alcohol consumption, sexual and aggravated assault and domestic abuse.



No person should be
sacrificed for Gold.

Mines bring an influx of young men to small communities that do not have the infrastructure to support this new population, increasing pressure on local law enforcement and emergency services. Mining and fracking locations have been associated with a rise in violence against women, especially increased rates of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Communities bear the weight of these traumas long after a mining company has left the region.

Mining is a boom bust industry, and doesn't provide Alaskans with long-term, generational jobs.

While the majority of the wealth generated by mining **flows out of Alaska into the pockets of wealthy investors far away**, local communities are often left worse off than before the mine. Mining does spur some temporary local employment, but most often, the higher paid, specialized workers are hired from out of state. These workers leave with the project, taking with them large paychecks that don't return to the Alaskan economy.



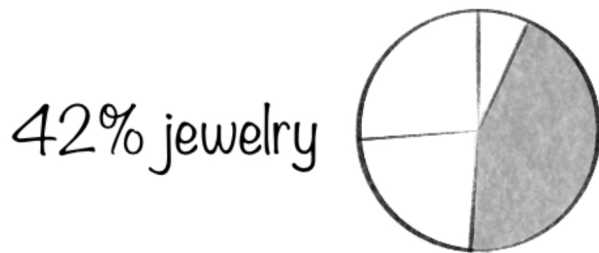
Gold mines will not be a replacement for the declining Alaskan oil and gas economies.

Metal mining contributes to only a tiny fraction of the state's economy. To generate as much state revenue as the oil and gas industry between 2009 and 2014, Alaska would need to develop 300 large scale metal mines. Scaling up mining across the state to account for this disparity would require impractical amounts of industrialization and damage tourism and commercial fishing economies.

WHERE OUR GOLD GOES

Gold is a non-critical mineral. Only 8% of annual demand is used for technology; the other 92% is used for non-essential purposes like jewelry and stored investment purposes.

Despite gold's aesthetic value, there is nothing beautiful about its extraction. The good news is there are alternatives to mining.

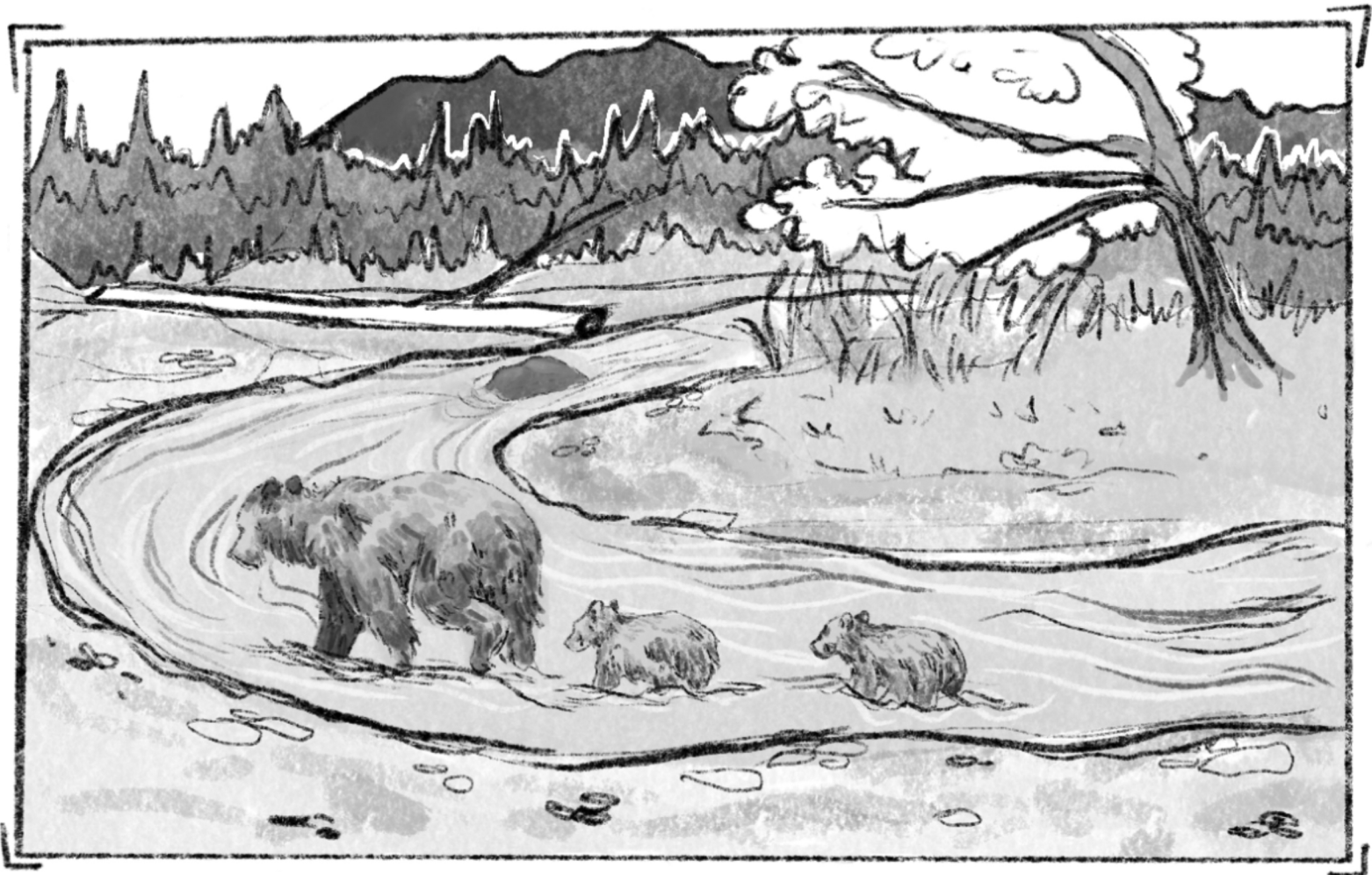


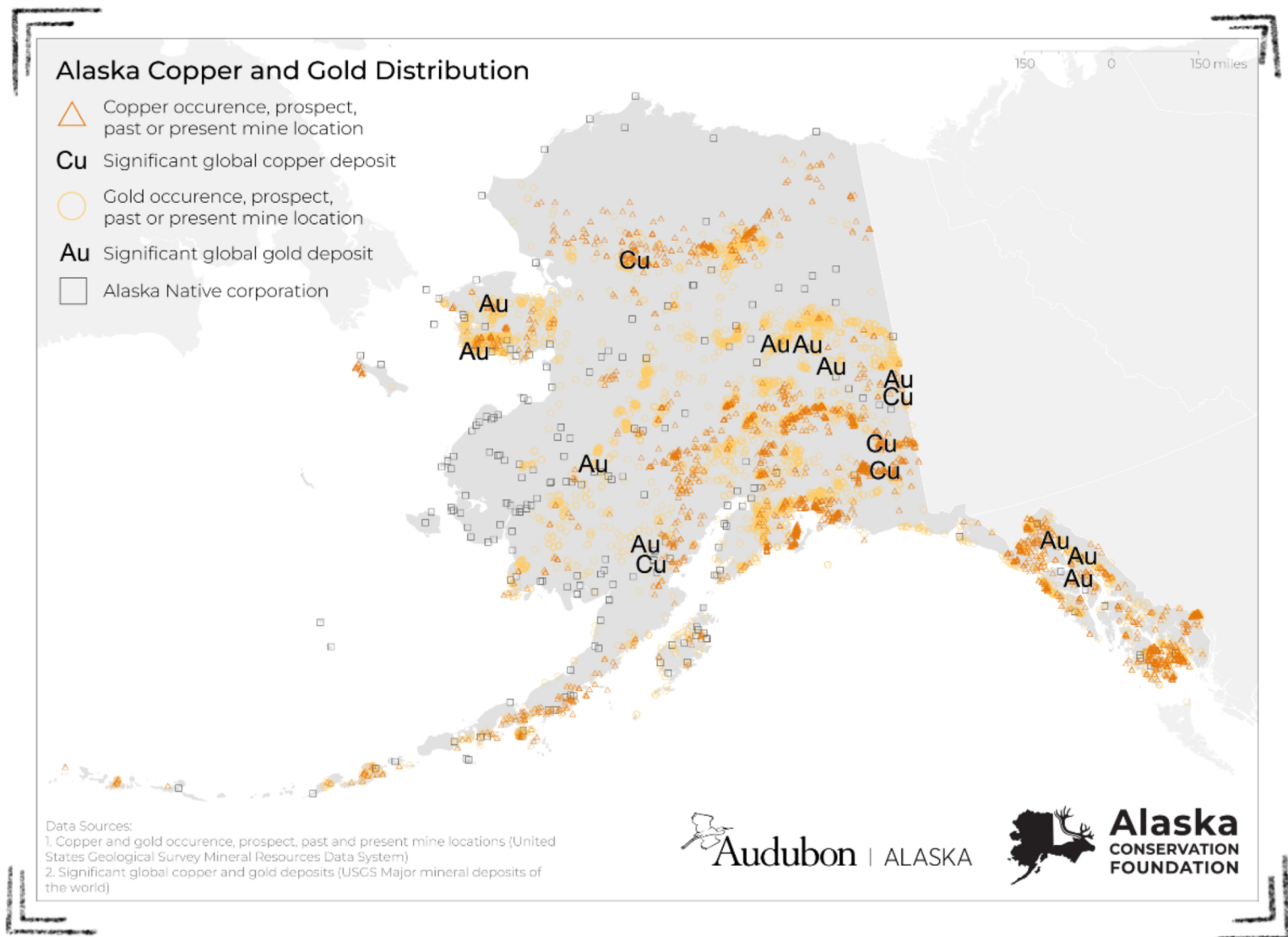
We do not need new gold

Today, recycled gold meets 24% of annual demand and has a significantly smaller environmental impact than newly mined gold. **Shifting industry towards electronics and jewelry recycling, rather than mining, will cost less, both to the environment and to our pocketbooks,** while meeting our need for gold.

HAPPENING NOW

As the 2025 map on the opposite page demonstrates, the list of operational and proposed gold and copper mines grows across Alaska. **Communities and organizations are building grassroots power to push back** against these mines and advocate for robust public processes and rigorous impact analyses to protect our lands and waters.





GET INVOLVED WITH ORGANIZATIONS IN YOUR REGION:

Fairbanks: Fairbanks Climate Action Coalition, The Northern Center, Native Movement

Anchorage & Mat Su: Salmon State, The Alaska Center, Native Movement, Alaska Community Action on Toxics, Defend the West Su

Kenai Peninsula: Cook Inletkeeper

South East: Salmon Beyond Borders, SalmonState, Rivers Without Borders

Gold is not worth the harm its extraction causes.

Unlike clean air, water, and healthy wild foods, it is not critical to our collective well-being. Mining corporations reap the short term benefits of extracting Alaska's minerals, destroying the plants, animals, and natural places we love and need to survive in their wake.



We can't eat gold.



The need for new gold is low, with the future of the industry being in recycled gold. We are digging up our lands and waters for gold, only to bury the gold again in safes and banks.

**Gold mining benefits foreign investors,
not local Alaskans.**

Gold mining won't fix our economy, nor will our laws protect us from the downstream flow of toxins unearthed in its extraction. Be it king, crab or clams, Alaskans already know the heartbreak of losing a beloved fishery. Protecting what we have left so that future generations can build a life nourished by our lands and waters is far more precious than gold.

PROTECT OUR SALMON FOR OUR KIDS



SCAN FOR MORE
INFORMATION AND
ADDITIONAL
RESOURCES



