

## **Mead: Conservation ideals part of buying**

By Cynthia Mead/ Zoo Corner  
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If the record sales in stores across the country are any indication, the holiday shopping season is well under way.

As we set out to purchase our gifts this season, please let us be mindful of the impact that our purchase have on our natural world and the million of individuals (including ourselves) who depend upon the earth for our future survival.

I am not suggesting that we don't buy gift, give to charities or cancel the holidays all together, so no letters please. But the gifts we give and holiday accoutrements we use can either have a positive or negative impact on wildlife, our earth and people who inhabit it. Let us strive to have a positive impact.

18 million tons of new materials are mined from the earth each year for use in the United States alone! These natural materials include, iron ore, copper, salt, petroleum, bauxite (aluminum) natural gas, coal, phosphate rocks (detergent), lead and silver. While it is impractical to suggest that we stop using these items all together, we can make a difference by discovering how little changes can decrease our consumption and also mandating that the mining of these materials be done in such a way as to minimize the adverse impact on our earth.

Until I started working for a conservation institution, I personally was not aware of the extreme devastation that mining gold or silver has on the earth and on the individuals whose water, soil and air are contaminated in the process of extraction. For example, during gold mining, tons of earth and rock are disrupted to access the high grade ore. Often these waste heaps are abandoned and restored ruining thousands of acres of habitat.

To make matters worse, many gold mines employ a process which includes dripping a cyanide solution through huge piles of ore to extract the gold. The cyanide often leaches into the soils and underground water killing fish and poisoning the water for animal and human consumption. Long term gold mining raises acid levels in near by rivers and lakes and some operations actually discarded the toxins into the ocean.

The effects are long lasting. The estimated 4,000 tons of mercury used to purify gold in the 1800's is still present in fish in to the Sacramento River and San Francisco Bay. And it is not just the water and soil that is affected. For many metals, the material mined still need to be purified. Smelting, or the melting of the materials to release it from the ore must be used to extract many precious metal. Smelting releases air pollutants such as nitrogen, sulfur, components of smog and acid rain as well as lead.

The good news is that there is something that we can do that will help reduce the problem. This holiday season, let us make a pledge to make purchases that are earth friendly and to let the business that we frequent know that we want to see more earth friendly products.

To obtain more information about the effects of mining and what people are doing to minimize its impact go to the No Dirty Gold Web site at [www.nodirtygold.org](http://www.nodirtygold.org). Let's make this holiday season one that has a lasting and positive effect on our world.

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