

Meeting Summary
Bonita Peak Community Advisory Group
June 23, 2022, 6:30—8:30 PM
Via Computer Conferencing and
In Person at Silverton Town Hall
1360 Greene St.

CAG members in attendance: Peter Butler, Chara Ragland, Helen Mary Johnson, Susan Livenick, Anthony Edwards, Parker Newby, Brian Devine, Charlie Smith, Terry Morris, Marcel Gaztambide, Alyssa Richmond, and Russ Anderson. Not in attendance: Justin Elkins and Ty Churchwell.

Also in attendance: Tom Schillaci, Rachel Vaughn, Jeffrey, Neil Westesen, Melissa Seims, Jessica Duggan, Christina Progress, Kerry Guy, Ben Martinez, David Heinze, James Hou, Athena Jones, Kerry Guy, Lesley Heinz, Ryan Bennet, Megan Shute, Eric Sandusky, and Craig Myers

Introductions and Announcements

Ty and Peter spoke at the 2022 Animas and San Juan Watersheds Conference in Farmington on June 8-9. Peter spoke about Bonita Peak activities, and Ty spoke on Good Samaritan legislation.

Some CAG members have changed work positions recently. Justin has become the utilities division manager for the City of Durango. Marcel announced he is leaving San Juan Citizens Alliance to run the FLC Environmental Center. He is very appreciative of partnerships he's made through the CAG and would like to remain on the group. He hopes it may provide opportunities for students to engage at the headwaters. Peter says he thinks it would be great if Marcel remains on the CAG.

Alyssa is moving on from San Juan Watershed coordinator and working for the San Juan Soil Conservation District to take a job in Farmington with Animas Environmental Services. She will be living in Española and telecommuting to Farmington. There may be a new community liaison from the Navajo Nation or New Mexico who might like to join the CAG in the future. Peter suggests that for now, she stays on the CAG and waits to see what happens with the liaison positions. CAG members show their hands in support of that idea.

Peter, Terry, and Parker went up to Lake Emma with EPA and their contractors to find survey markers and locations for drilling into the Sunnyside Mine pool. Both Terry and Parker provided valuable information and assistance on the trip.

Update on WQ Standards Proposal for Upper Mineral Creek

The CAG's proposal before WQCC was adopted June 14th. A segment of Mineral Creek from Mill Creek to Middle Fork of Mineral Creek has been given a new aquatic-life designation and aquatic-life table value standards (TVS). The segment has seen significant water quality improvements, and a small population of brook trout now exists. TVS for several metals is not attained during spring runoff. More characterization will be needed to determine how much more improvement may be feasible which will lead to site specific standards during this time period

Related to how much more improvement is feasible, Peter, Parker, and Kirstin sampled the Silver Ledge adit in May. The flow was 80 gpm and high lead concentrations were quite high – 1500 ug/l. It's not clear what remediation may be feasible at the site and more investigation is needed.

EPA Removal Program Work at North Star and Terry Tunnel

The North Star is off Hwy 550 near Silverton. It was on the ARSG list as a significant source of metals but was not put on the Superfund list of sites because it is located near Silverton. There have been some issues with homeowners having trouble obtaining mortgages from Fannie May (in Pueblo) when a home is within 3000 feet of a Superfund site. Therefore, the EPA removal program is working on the site as opposed to the remedial (Superfund) program.

EPA removed a beaver dam in the North Star mine drainage that created a large pond in front of the mine in 2020. Last year they started to move some of the mine waste away from Mineral Creek. This year they will be removing a lot more. The goal is to move the material away from the creek and to consolidate it into a smaller footprint. They also want to re-line the mine drainage ditch and at the bottom will allow the drainage to spread out in the flood plain near the creek where it is expected that beavers will move in to create ponds.

San Juan County wants the mine waste pile to continue to look like a mine site since it is very visible coming into town from Red Mountain Pass. So, EPA is not planning to revegetate the front side of the pile. They will revegetate the top of the pile, and it will have slight drainage gradient to the back on the pile where the mine drainage ditch is.

The CAG asks some questions regarding capping the waste in some fashion to keep it from leaching metals during spring runoff and periodically cleaning out the anticipated, future beaver ponds near the creek. These questions weren't fully answered. This year's work will start tomorrow and will probably take about 6 weeks.

3-D Model of Fluvial Tailings near Howardsville

James Hou with EPA discussed the characterization work being done at the Howardsville Mill (Pride of the West Mill). He had hoped to show a 3-D model of the site, but the modelers were not available this evening. There are six principal study questions associated with the characterization work: what is the extent of

contaminated soil, what is the extent of the contaminated groundwater, what is the source of the contaminated ground water, what is the efficacy of diverting this water, what seepage is coming from tailings ponds, and where does the contaminant loading enter the Animas River?

Peter asked about liners under the tailings at the site. Terry didn't think that many of the ponds were lined. James said they did not drill through liners. The data summary is on the EPA website. It shows groundwater monitoring wells, boreholes, and test pits.

EPA contractors dug about six test pits from which they pulled groundwater samples. Peter asked if they hit groundwater before the bottom of tailings. James wasn't sure.

EPA has developed a potentiometric map which shows the flow of groundwater. Zinc concentrations in the Animas River do rise as the water passes the site, likely caused by groundwater from below the tailings. Someone asks about bedrock that might outcrop, causing groundwater to come to the surface. This is similar to what happens above the 32nd Street put in at Durango, at the bottom end of the Animas Valley, and what happens near the Mayflower Tailings Impoundment #4. Could there be a ledge funneling groundwater to the surface at the lower end of the Howardsville site as well? No answer to that question.

There is significant zinc loading to the river at the lower end of the Howardsville site – about 20 lbs/day. Peter points out that a lot of the less significant BPMD sites have about 3-4 or less lbs/day of zinc loading. The big ones like the Gold King and Red & Bonita contribute about 50 lbs/day of zinc.

James described that the 3-D model shows the groundwater plume of contaminants and allows you to visualize what has happened over time at the site. There is about 280k cubic yards of tailings. They also have historical photos of impoundments. More data is needed, particularly seasonal data. Most of the model is based upon a couple of synoptic sampling events.

Peter asks about thoughts on remediation of the site. James says there are several options. One is to enhance the cutoff of the area where the contamination enters and seal it from the shallow groundwater. Also, one could pull the tailings away to minimize groundwater interactions.

Marcel asks about 3D modeling at OU3 and if there is any modeling being done at OU2 (Mayflower Tailings Impoundments). Jessica Duggan with EPA says they don't have modeling at OU2.

Helen Mary asks about influx of groundwater and how that relates to the potentiometric? Can they map where the rise occurs? James says it looks like the groundwater is moving through a wetland and then finds its way into the river in a localized area.

Peter asks James to send the presentation to the CAG.

EPA and New Mexico and Navajo Settlements Over Gold King

Christina discussed the two settlements which are very similar. New Mexico and the Navajo Nation both filed lawsuits for damages caused by the Gold King release. Other than individual tort claims filed by different landowners and businesses, these settlements negate most of the potential litigation related to the Gold King release and the major potential responsible parties in relation to the Superfund designation. Both settlements are about \$30 million each. They include natural resource damages, future federal grants, and attorney fees.

EPA's community involvement plan will be expanded to include New Mexico and the Navajo Nation. Both entities may designate community liaisons who may want to participate in the CAG. New Mexico also wants to be part of the alert notification plan. EPA will add their contacts. The settlements have been approved by the court.

The hope is that with these settlements completed, there will be more communication and interaction between stakeholders and all the efforts at the site will now be focused on cleanup.

Administrative Items

- ✓ Meeting Summaries. Parker moves for approval. Anthony seconds the motion. All vote in favor of the motion.
- ✓ CAG Discussion Time. Peter will schedule around the 2nd week of July.
- ✓ Proposed July Meeting Change – Wednesday 27th because of some conflicts for some CAG members on the 28th. Silverton has a good system for hybrid in-person and Zoom meetings, so the next meeting will again be in Silverton.
- ✓ Long-Range Schedule. The CAG is planning on a tour in late August for CAG members with EPA. Most of the focus of the tour will be for Operating Unit 3 (OU3) which includes the Sunnyside Mine pool and the Gladstone area. In October it is anticipated that there will be a more in depth discussion about what to do in OU3 which is easily the largest source area of metals within the BPMD.
- ✓ Future Agenda Items? *Tailings Sampling between Eureka and Howardsville, Plans for Howardsville Mill, Macroinvertebrate Data, Drilling Locations in Lake Emma, Site Specific Plans for Interim Remedial Actions, etc.*

8:20 PM

Adjourn