

Meeting Summary
Bonita Peak Mining District Community Advisory Group
April 15, 2025, 5:30—7:28 PM
Via Computer Conferencing and In Person
at Silverton City Hall Conference Room
Silverton, CO

CAG Members attending: Chara Ragland, Charlie Smith, Parker Newby, Ken Balleweg, Anthony Edwards, and David Palmer. Online: Ty Churchwell, Susan Livenick, Helen Mary Johnson, Chris Hill and Jason Fast.

Also in attendance: Kirstin Brown, Terry Morris, Jim Morris, Mitch Dorsk, Jake Kurzweil, Lisa Merrill, and Mark Rudolph. Online: Roy Smith, Melissa Smeins, Joe Fox, Jillian Kugle, Peter Butler, Samantha Wright, Vince Bacalan, Vanessa Ledesma, Allen McCaw, Tom Schillaci, David Heinz, Ashley Brooks and others.

EPA attendees: Online: Athena Jones, Joy Jenkins, Jessica Dugan, and James Hou.

Introductions and Announcements

Introductions were made around the room by attendees.

Chara introduced new CAG member Ken Balleweg, who was appointed to the CAG by San Juan County, Colorado.

Mark Rudolph announced an 8-hour HAZWOPER refresher course would be offered on Wednesday, May 14, 2025 at Kendall Mountain. The course is free.

Anthony Edwards announced a BPMD open house on Thursday, June 26, 2025. There will be presentations by BLM, USFS, MSI and others. Refreshments will be served.

Presentations

Ty Churchwell introduced Roy Smith, BLM Colorado Lead Water Rights Specialist, who gave an online PowerPoint presentation on the transbasin purchase of water rights at Burrows Creek.

Roy Smith – BLM

Roy discussed the BLM acquisition project at Mineral Point Ditch, which previously diverted water from Burrows Creek, a tributary of the North Fork of the Upper Animas drainage, into the Uncompahgre River drainage. BLM pursued the acquisition to gain some important benefits:

- Restore flows to Burrows Creek and Animas River.
- Dilute and flush out heavy metals in Burrows Creek.
- Restore hydrology of wetlands and fens adjacent to Burrows Creek, which filter out heavy metals.

- Facilitate remediations of abandoned mine land (AML) sites adjacent to the ditch.

Water rights characteristics included:

- 11 cfs, initiated in 1956 but rarely used.
- Transbasin diversion from Animas River watershed to Uncompahgre River watershed.
- Historic uses included irrigation of 140 acres, stock watering, domestic use and fish culture on a variety of lands near Ouray.

Mineral Point Ditch was approximately 1,000 feet long and crossed from south to north under County Road 2. The transaction received funds from BLM's AML Program and Water Conservation Fund, and also from Trout Unlimited (TU).

The water rights were Junior Instream Flow Water Rights:

- Flow rates designed to support macroinvertebrate community
- BLM is leasing the acquired water rights to Southwestern Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB): a 99-year lease starting in 2025.
- CWCB has accepted BLM's offer and preliminarily appropriated 3.75 cfs from May 1 to June 15, 1.6 cfs from June 16 to July 15, 0.58 cfs from July 16 to October 31, and 0.19 cfs from November 1 to March 31.
- Partners in the transaction included BLM, TU and CWCB.

Ken asked about the approximately 5 cfs not listed in the transaction.

Roy stated that the average uses of the water rights is a fraction of the total due to Colorado Law; the excess water will just disappear.

Lisa commented on Roy's dedication and exemplary experience getting the transaction done, noting that he is irreplaceable.

Ty thanked Lisa and Roy for bringing the water rights to our attention, and commented that it was quite a journey to success. He commented that TU contributed \$5K locally and \$3K from TU National for attorney fees.

Mitch Dorsk – Southern Ute Indian Tribe

Mitch gave a PowerPoint presentation summarizing his Master's Thesis research regarding a tracer study using geochemical data, including rare earth elements (REE), collected by MSI in the BPMD during 2016-2018 field activities on the Upper Animas River.

The thesis focused on an area of interest around Cement Creek. The study analyzed waters from 53 mine seeps and springs in the area. REE were analyzed as fingerprints for water quality, in addition to Mn, Fe and pH. The REE were used for study of redox in the mine waters: REEs have no redox state so they stay dissolved in water. The results can be used to identify source rocks. In the BPMD four distinct source rock signatures were identified. Mitch identified a Cerium (Ce) anomaly that varied under specific redox conditions. A high Ce anomaly (>0.7) correlated with Mn >10 ppm, with lots of dissolved Fe. A low Ce (<0.7) had lower Fe and Mn concentrations. The fingerprints were used to identify possible connectivity between waters at different elevations and seep/spring locations. One connectivity suggested water from American Tunnel may be draining to other drainages at other mines (sample location SS18).

Questions:

- Charlie Smith asked if there was a comparable study on the Upper Animas River. Mitch said no, they only studied Cement Creek.
- Peter Butler commented that American Tunnel was collecting local water and it was mixed inside the mine workings. The seeps and springs should have the same mixed water.
Mitch agreed there is mixing of impaired water quality, but not with clean water.
- Joy asked how we can know there is water connectivity versus similar geology showing the same REE?
Mitch said that by matching pH and Ce anomaly, and working along high Fe and Mn, and low pH.
Joy mentioned that EPA was planning on getting REE data this sampling season.
Mitch commented that REE is just another line of evidence showing connectivity is possible.

Joy Jenkins – EPA

Joy introduced a PowerPoint tour of summer field activities by the agencies active in BPMD: EPA, USFS and BLM. The presentation should be available soon on the CAG documents site.

USFS Update – who?

There was an agreement with DRMS regarding the Brooklyn Mine pond and waste rock work, which was completed. The only remaining work is coordination on the mine tunnel. The project is currently in a funding moratorium.

Athena Jones – EPA

Athena's portion of the presentation included a discussion of work on the Bonita Peak repository waiting on awarding a contract. Current activity includes working on:

- Stormwater channels.
- Leachate pond fence.
- Revegetation in green highlighted areas.
- Transport and placement of waste in the repository from Gladstone IWTP; the best case scenario is it will begin this year.
- Stormwater discharge; passive drainage beginning in the next few weeks.
Joy mentioned that the pH was around 7, so it is good to discharge.
- 2019 IROD status update – six items shown on the presentation.

Joy Jenkins – EPA

Joy's discussed other EPA actions to occur later this summer:

- Gold King road realignment.
- Red & Bonita portal extension in front of the mine portal.
- Kohler mine adit bulkhead; low pH water is damaging concrete. They plan to do an assessment now to decide how to protect the bulkhead, and install a pressure gauge on the bulkhead.

OU2 RI Investigations:

- EPA will install groundwater monitoring wells this summer.
- Spring sampling begins 4/21/2025, then additional sampling this fall. The number of sampling locations has been reduced.
- May need infiltration remediation at the tailing ponds.
- Soil boring will be installed around Mayflower Mill
- Groundwater wells will be installed around County Road 2, around July/August.
- Risk assessment is planned for a possible health risk due to illegal camping on San Juan Historical Society land.

Bandora Mine:

- Install well and transducer in early June.
Tom had a question: he did not see the old mill structure on the hill, and asked if the 2 new holding ponds are on the right?
Joy said yes, they are being used during drilling and will be mitigated after drilling ceases.
- EPA Office of Research and Development (ORD) will test a polymer surface coating on Bandora mine waste designed to prevent leaching.
Peter asked why was the Bandora Mine selected, it takes a long time to get up there.
Joy replied that its mine waste has the highest metal concentrations and it has a good access agreement.
Anthony asked how long the coating will last, and will they put on another coating.
Joy was not sure, but the testing would be just one coat and see how it lasts to the next year.
Parker asked if recreational activity will be blocked off.
Joy did not know if the area will be blocked off, and Parker recommended it be.
Anthony asked how do they know the before and after concentrations.
Joy said they sample before and after, and simulate a rain event.
Ty suggested we consider a tour of the Bandora Mine, since it has been years.

James Hou - EPA

James discussed lower Cement Creek and Mineral Creek investigations:

- Field sampling plans (FSP) are scheduled for May.
- Reports will be out soon on the winter 2024-25 sampling, validation and analyses.
- Long term monitoring FSP will include benthic macroinvertebrates.
- OU3 RI investigation task order ended in November 2024. A follow-on task order is planned to complete the remainder of OU3.

Melissa Smeins - BLM

Melissa 's described BLM spring 2025 planning in the BPMD:

- Forest Queen Mine – June through August; increased wetness around the adit needs to be drained.
- Prospect Gulch – July through August; there currently is a funding moratorium, but they may get the go-ahead to revegetate.

- Terry Tunnel – September; revegetation planned, possible access control.
- Animas Forks – high lead in soil may impact public activity.
- 2025 projects may impact roads in San Juan County.

Administrative Items

Chara asked for a vote on the final revision to the CAG Mission Statement. Parker made a motion to vote on it, and Anthony seconded the motion. The Mission Statement was approved by unanimous hand vote, including online CAG members.

Parker noted that CAG's Animas Canyon sampling is planned for Sunday, May 4 at Elk Creek (A75RB) and Cascade Creek (A75Ba), access/weather permitting. Sampling at Crazy Woman (A73Dcw) is scheduled for Thursday, May 8, access/weather permitting.

Anthony mentioned that the county will be working on roads this summer, and some will be closed overnight from 9 pm to 6 am. He will provide more information when it is put out. He also noted that attendance is welcome at the Silverton Planning Group meeting tomorrow (April 16, 2025).

The next CAG meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 20, 2025 in Durango. Chara will send out a zoom meeting announcement. This meeting was adjourned.

7:28 PM**Adjourn**