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Let's work on Animas quality

By Gina Myers

Four-plus years after SGC offered use of the Mayflower as a repository to facilitate cleanup of the Silverton Caldera, and on the 5th anniversary of the massive EPA-caused Gold King Spill, EPA has finally taken a useful step to potentially improve water quality. On July 29, 2020, EPA issued a proposed plan for the Mayflower and demanded that SGC provide its property for EPA's use.

SGC is currently evaluating EPA's demand as EPA presented upwards of 560 pages of documentation requiring reasoned review and analysis. SGC looks forward to working through the details with EPA to turn a plan into a reality.

EPA's demand, however, is not simply a request for access. It is a demand to take SGC's property, including ground that has been fully reclaimed and remediated by SGC, and ground that adjoins a Mill of national historical significance. The plan is subject to community review, which is essential to make sure what actually gets built makes sense.

It is a good sign that EPA has finally got to this stage, as improving Animas River water quality is not complicated. It requires focus on the Cement Creek adits, operation of EPA's Gladstone Water Treatment Plant at capacity, installation and closure of bulkheads where appropriate, and residual stabilization and closure activities.

But more, it requires a recognition that water quality can be fixed now. SGC has been demonstrably improving Animas River water quality for years. So too had the Animas River Stakeholders Group, along with the CDPHE, DRMS, BLM and USFS. But a wrench was thrown into these, and further, good works.

Not only did EPA cause the 3-million gallon Gold King Spill, EPA's conduct had what at the time was an unknown but more deleterious effect. It dealt a debilitating blow to further Animas River water quality improvement.

Instead of building upon the past successes in collaboratively improving Animas River water quality, sensibility, momentum, and further good work has been stifled by an agency that in the 5 years since the Spill has still not come up with its first 5-year plan; by an agency that refuses to turn a valve to treat more water at a treatment plant operating at less than capacity; by an agency that takes four years to recognize the value in a site-wide repository; and by an agency that elevates unnecessary study above simple action.

The Silverton Caldera is replete with examples of EPA's unnecessary study, and even now, they still want to continue the unnecessary study of Impoundment 4 of the Mayflower.

SGC has proven through five years and over \$10 million of intensive investigation that there is no evidence that the Mayflower Mill and Impoundments are the source of anything but de minimis metals loading, if any, to the Animas River. Even when EPA finally stumbles upon the recognition of the benefits of a site-wide repository, it still cannot stymie its zeal for unnecessary study.

At this, the 5-year anniversary of the Gold King Spill, we should return to what was known before EPA stifled progress at the Silverton Caldera. That this can be fixed. Stop studying and start doing. Put decisions in the hands of stakeholders and the local community.

Improve Animas River water quality. It is not complicated. SGC remains a committed partner in collaborative efforts to improve Animas River water quality, and working in good faith towards this common goal.

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