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Comments on EPA interim plan

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Editor's note: In response to a media request, the EPA on Wednesday released public comments on the agency's Proposed Plan for Interim Remedial Actions in the Bonita Peak Mining District Superfund Site.

The agency has proposed interim cleanups at 26 of 48 locations in the Bonita Peak Mining District to fast-track the Superfund cleanup process.

The EPA received comments during a June 21 Silverton meeting and in writing from 22 total commenters.

Here are some of the comments:

Kim Eisner, Silverton:

The letter I received about my property being involved in a remedial program came as a real surprise and my first reaction was fear about what this might mean. I did understand there was a comment session coming up, so I read the document suggested from the online source as directed in the letter.

My revelation was that I did not have enough information to make a comment. I did attend the meeting and, I believe, I was the only impacted property holder speaking on the subject. Maybe there were others feeling that they did not have enough information also. I did not know that we would be commenting only without any answers. I know the Superfund was started after the Gold King entrance was "unplugged" and caused a flood resulting in National attention for the San Juan area. I also know the water purity is a priority for us, LaPlata County and all impacted parties down stream.

We continue to be the target of many of those "impacted parties". After the meeting I was approached by Cary Guy and invited to join them at my

property the next day on their review session. He was very professional and followed through with on-line resources for more detailed information as he promised. I now have a clearer understanding of the EPA intent. However, I do not agree with including the "Campground #4" as a priority for action.

It is all private property, the access drive is blocked and posted "private property", and the area has never been a "campground" to the public. I have also spoken to the only other property owner in "campground #4" and he agrees with what I am writing. Please don't protect us from ourselves.

The areas listed as interim actions are minor contributors to the superfund area. Even if all were addressed, the result would be minor compared to the Cement Creek issue. The negative publicity about this clean-up continues to impact San Juan County.

The recent sludge truck turn-over in Cement Creek has already hit the newspapers. We have had a series of additional negative factors also impacting our economic vitality - a bad drought, major fire, no train for more than 40 days, road closures, and rock slides. Our backcountry and history are our key tourist draws.

The proposed actions will negatively impact our backcountry and possibly our historic properties. More importantly, there would be no impact on the visible and publicly concerned Cement Creek water quality. In my opinion, the EPA needs to concentrate money and effort on the Big Issue in Gladstone impacting the water quality. That is where our concern lies, and it is the focus of our downstream communities and citizens, as they often tell us.

Steve Rich, Silverton:

The Plan would waste almost \$10 million dollars of tax revenue on projects with little or no proven environmental benefit.

There is no scientific basis for the Plan, which was developed without any meaningful analysis of alternatives and is built upon multiple layers of pure speculation. The money would be better spent to operate the EPA Gladstone Water Treatment Plant at its full capacity.

This alone would have a measurable positive impact on the Animas River water quality. We are also in danger of losing many of our historic sites due to the "improvements" of this ill-conceived plan. The cleanup of these sites should not alter the historic nature of San Juan County. The removal of structures and mine dumps should be considered a criminal act as it would be if private citizens vandalized the sites.

The Antiquities Act prevents those in the private sector from stealing our heritage, but what prevents big government from acting irresponsibly? Our history is the future of San Juan County and it must be preserved at all costs.

I respectfully request that the EPA withdraw and reconsider this wasteful and

ill-conceived Plan. The actions taken in the recent past without proper consideration have made a small problem turn into a big problem.

Brian Luther, Silverton

I am writing to comment upon EPA's Proposed Plan for Interim Remedial Actions at the Bonita Peak Mining District. The Plan would waste almost \$10 million on projects with absolutely zero proven environmental benefit.

There is no scientific basis for the Plan, which was developed without any meaningful alternatives analysis and is built on guesswork and speculation. EPA should focus on improving water quality, not wasting the taxpayers' money.

I am hereby requesting that EPA withdraw and reconsider its wasteful ill-conceived Plan. Thank you.

Brian E Luther Silverton LP
Gas Llc

Frank Skillen, Durango

First of all, \$10 million seems a lot to be spending on the proposed actions. I would think this could be done for a lot less.

Second, I can understand organizing this proposal by type of cleanup activity, it is easier than specifying activity per site. But this gives no insight as to what will be done by site and, hence, the cost per site.

3. Third, the proposed actions will most likely result in negligible improvement in water quality downstream of Silverton. So, where is the cost/benefit analysis. This seems to be a large investment for a very small return.

4 Finally, nothing in this Plan purports to address the 4 big draining adits contributing the majority of the metals loading in the Animas, namely, the Red & Bonita, Mogul, American Tunnel and the Gold King, although AMD from the GK is being treated.

I call on the EPA to include these other draining mines in the treatment plant works. As I understand it, there is enough capacity to handle this input.

Overall, this effort has tweaked my skepticism and I have to wonder if this Plan is an effort by the EPA to give the affected communities a warm feeling that something is being done.