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EPA interim remedial plan draws criticism

ARSG coordinator says it doesn't provide the 'biggest bang for buck'

The EPA's proposed interim remedial action plan drew some criticism at a public comment session on the matter at Silverton Town Hall last Thursday evening, June 21.

Peter Butler, coordinator for the Animas River Stakeholders Group said his main concern was prioritization.

He expressed doubt that the EPA's plan to work on 26 sites over the next five years would produce the "biggest bang for the buck" in terms of water quality results in the upper Animas.

Citing the \$8.3 million cost of the EPA's plan, he suggested it might make more sense for the EPA to instead expand water treatment at Gladstone to include the Red and Bonita mine discharge, along with the American Tunnel.

"You'd get 10 times as much metals reduction, is my guess," Butler told EPA officials.

And he pointed out the EPA has produced no estimate of metals reduction at all to be gained by its

remedial action plan.

"At least get some rough estimates on what kind of reductions you'll get," Butler advised the EPA.

Many of the EPA projects slated in their proposed plan involve diverting streams around mine waste dumps and other features.

Butler said the agency could probably come up with a good estimate on what gains could be made.

"Take a sample above the waste and below the waste. See how many pounds of metal you're getting out," Butler said.

"It just seems to me that it makes sense that if you're going to spend \$8.3 million, you ought to have some kind of sense of what kind of benefit you get," Butler told EPA officials. "At least some estimate."

Bill Simon said the EPA hauling sludge from the Gladstone treatment plant along Cement Creek to the Kittimac tailings site in the upper Animas amounts to "moving toxic material from watershed to another."

He pointed out that the Upper Animas actually has a decent fishery, while Cement Creek does not.

BONITA PEAK MINING DISTRICT SUPERFUND SITE

"By all mean, that's our fishery and we want to save it."

Simon said the action has not been fully vetted and if something were to go wrong at the Kittimac it could lead to a fish kill.

And like Butler, Simon questioned the cost effectiveness of the actions.

He suggested the EPA plan was to "just shoot \$8.5 million at it and hope we'll get great results. We need more information than that if we want to spend the taxpayers dollars."

Kim Eisner, a Howardsville property owner, said she was surprised to find the EPA designating a portion of her land along the Animas River as "Campground 4," and that the EPA considered the site a potential human health risk.

"I never heard of Campground Number 4," Eisner said. "It's not a campsite and it's never been a campground. We've owned it since the early 1950s and I've never seen anyone camp there. And it's posted 'private property, no trespassing.'"

Eisner said "there's nobody camping there. I can't imagine this

is hurting anybody. Why are you picking on a site where nobody's camping?"

Eisner said she sees "a higher priority in Gladstone. I'd rather see those problems solved."

Sunnyside Gold Corp., along with Rep. Scott Tipton, R-Cortez, have also raised questions about why the Gladstone treatment plant is not treating water from the nearby American Tunnel and Red & Bonita mines.

In April, Sunnyside Gold produced a report from consultant Pioneer Technical Service Inc. of Helena, Mont., showing the interim plant at Gladstone is capable of nading the additional discharge.

Tipton questioned why the full capacity is not used in a April 30 letter to the EPA.

EPA officials said last week that they expect to respond to Tipton's query soon.

How to comment on the EPA proposal

The EPA is seeking public comment on the Proposed Plan for Interim Remedial Actions (proposed

plan) for the Bonita Peak Mining District Superfund site.

A 30-day public comment period is open from June 14 through July 16. During this time, the public is encouraged to submit any comments on the proposed plan to EPA.

You may obtain a copy of the proposed plan on the EPA website at <https://www.epa.gov/superfund/bonita-peak>, by calling the EPA Superfund Records Center at (800) 227-8917 ext. 312-7273, or view it at one of the following locations:

- Silverton Library, 1117 Reese Street.
- Durango Public Library, 1900 East Third Avenue, Durango.
- Farmington Public Library, 2101 Farmington Avenue, Farmington, N.M.
- Diné College Shiprock Campus Library (Senator John Pinto Library), BIA Road 0570, Shiprock, N.M.

Comments on the proposed plan may be submitted until July 16, via e-mail to peterson.cynthia@epa.gov or by postal mail to: Cynthia Peterson (SOC-PAI), U.S. EPA, 1595 Wynkoop St., Denver, CO 80202-1129