

**Community Meeting
Related to Gold King Mine Incident
and Potential Community Response**

**Meeting Notes
August 31st, 2015**

(DRAFT)

A meeting of community groups, leaders and interested citizens was held on the 31st of August. The agenda is in Attachment A. It was convened by State Senator Ellen Roberts. The facilitator was Marsha Porter-Norton. Approximately 55 people attended. Two EPA personnel were present as observers.

Opening

The meeting started by everyone agreeing to the agenda and ground rules. Both Senator Roberts and the facilitator acknowledged that everyone has strong feelings about the mine incident but that this meeting was meant to be collaborative; to look to the future; to focus on working together; and to leave the negative feelings aside for the session.

Senator Roberts introduced five representatives from the RWEACT group. RWEACT (the “W” is silent) formed during the Papoose and West Fork Fires near Wolf Creek Pass, Creede, South Fork and surrounding areas/counties in 2013. Their history is that a County Commissioner from Hinsdale County, Cindy Dozier, met with a water manager from the San Luis Valley and also Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) Board Member, Travis Smith. They conceptualized an idea of a team forming to address the crisis but also look at long term solutions. The group does not take on advocacy projects. More information about RWEACT can be found at: www.rweact.org.

They are governed via a core group. This group is a decision making group but takes input from a much larger group of almost 80 partners. They initially received emergency funding from the State of Colorado (over \$2 million in funding) and this helped immediately define a work plan. For example, one project they did right away was to put in a sensor system for alerting communities as to any flash flooding from the degraded soils (soils after their wildfire had essentially “cemented” over).

One of their immediate steps was to develop a mission statement and develop a professional logo so that everyone could identify their group as it was seen as being independent. Hinsdale County initially served as their fiscal agent. Also, they formed a mission statement and made sure they worked through any turf / communication issues, which naturally do come up, they said. They hired a coordinator who formerly was the SW Area Manager for Colorado Parks and Wildlife (Tom Spezze).

The speakers emphasized that they believe they have been successful because they have an inclusive group, because they focused on do-able, necessary projects, and they have adequate capacity (e.g. staff). They listen to ideas and the ones that have support move forward as funding is available. They have kept their eye on short term, crisis projects but also long term projects. Now, their group has

been asked to take on a related role and formally participate in the Forest Planning process underway. They are also forming a nonprofit.

Both Senator Roberts and the RWEACT speakers said they were not saying this model would work for our community. It was being offered as something to think about after a disaster.

Post Gold King Spill Ideas

After the RWEACT group members spoke, there was a brief Q&A period. Then, tables formed with 5-8 people and each was asked to talk about these questions (in italics below). Each group was asked to report on 1-2 salient points.

- *Is there interest in doing this?*
- *If so, what are some key questions to address?*
- *What would the purposes be...?*
- *Who might serve on it?*

Salient points raised by the groups were organized by the facilitator by theme topics as follows:

Governance , Idea of a New Group, Concerns and Issues

- ✓ Yes, form a new group. The majority of the tables felt this would be good. Some had caveats such as: it has to show results; cannot be just another meeting; has to be focused; has to be effective.
- ✓ Another idea was no, don't form a new group but do something where existing groups are "stitched together" to work on projects. This could begin with an asset inventory of what everyone is doing.
- ✓ Boundary of the group: Two views: a) we should include New Mexico in some way as they are obviously impacted and have a watershed effort on the San Juan and on the New Mexico portion of the Animas; and b) we should start with just the two counties in Colorado and invite New Mexico stakeholders to observe but have this be a Colorado effort.
- ✓ The group needs a focus and on both short term and long term goals. Without focus, the group won't be useful. No one has more meetings to attend just to attend them.
- ✓ Long term change is desired to be part of this; we need to add value to what is already occurring, not duplicate.
- ✓ Concern about funding a new organization.

- ✓ Who is on the group makes a difference. How are the selected?
- ✓ We need non biased, communicator role.
- ✓ Need horse power to get this done.
- ✓ There is credibility in having a separate group. This is not to degrade anyone's effort or to be negative. It's just reality that all organizations naturally come with some level of baggage or history.

Summary by the facilitator: There was support among the majority of tables to form a new group that is independent. Two tables expressed a strong desire that the group has to be results oriented and focused and another table expressed that a new group is not really necessary but rather, existing groups could be utilized to work on projects.

Opportunities forming a new group could bring

- ✓ Increase collaboration
- ✓ Increase community resiliency (there is a model of Community Resiliency that was discussed by the San Juan Basin Health Department executive director and it could be a resource).
- ✓ What are the other risks to the river? Could such a group address them?
- ✓ What could the power of the collective accomplish? There are some "800# gorillas" in the room around long term river and mine clean up and what that will take. Interesting to think about what the collective could do about that...
- ✓ Stakeholders need to find their voice through this.
- ✓ This could catalyzes conversations
- ✓ To see what other communities have done around a mine spill.....a river in Montana was cited as an example to look at (Clark Fork, MT).

Data

- ✓ Need for information but not just that, we need peace of mind. We have lost our peace of mind when it comes to the river. Data is not trusted by everyone, by the many in the larger public. The river is open but many (i.e. via unscientific *Herald* poll) do not trust that the sediment or water is safe. How can this trust be restored?

- ✓ Collect base line data and compile, and disseminate.
- ✓ A question: We have a baseline of the river data and the question is: Is that ok?
- ✓ Communication is key. If the one thing we could do is first assemble the data available and get it out to the public in a way that makes sense, we will have done a good service. People don't understand or don't trust the data, and it's not presented well.

Communication

- ✓ Include all river users.
- ✓ Develop a better public warning system.
- ✓ We need a place to get and share accurate information. What you hear on the streets is not necessarily true. (This was stated as being true in both in Silverton/SJC and in Durango/LPC.)
- ✓ Decision makers and river users can have a forum for increasing communication.
- ✓ We need more communication and a place to relay trusted, accurate information.
- ✓ We need messaging.

Other thoughts: (Some of these relate to the above topics as well)

- ✓ There are various paths to community resiliency. There is a crisis element and what we do with that path and there is a longer term or risk prevention element. The communications plans for each are different.
- ✓ Communities are connected – maybe this incident has helped us all realize that...
- ✓ There is the long term and the short term. These cannot be measured in time but rather, there is a crisis phase (many felt we are still in this phase) and there is the risk reduction or risk prevention phase.

The facilitator summed some of the roles a new group might play:

- Communication (for many reasons but to build confidence and piece of mind in governments' and communities' ability(ies) to handle this crisis and its aftermath but also, perhaps, deal with future events if they were to occur) ("Acute Incident Communication" was raised as a phrase)
- Data (compiling, digesting, disseminating and making it understandable, trusted)
- Monitoring (would include groups doing this already)

- Address needs that are short-term and of a crisis nature
- Address needs that are long term and of a risk prevention nature
(Note: A comment was made that short and long term cannot necessary be put on firm timelines. These should be considered phases not looked at purely in a time framework.)
- Developing measurable outcomes

The group brainstormed how such a group might look in terms of structure. Ideas:

- Get the main decision makers together and have the group set priorities and gain a focus. Beginning list of entities that have to be the table: State; Federal entities including EPA, USFS and BLM; Health Departments; elected officials; all affected Cities and Towns; all affected Counties; Animas River Stakeholders Group. The suggestion was made that this group take a long term view of the health of the river and the watershed. Others amended this idea to include shorter-term, crisis management tasks too. (Note: This list should not be considered exhaustive. It is a brainstorming list.)
- Have another meeting of those in this room to take next steps.
- Have the counties (San Juan and La Plata) lead this.

No final decision was made.

Immediate actions

- 1) Understand potential funding streams.
- 2) The group agreed that Senator Roberts will convene the next meeting. She will use the mailing list used for this meeting and add names. She is serving in an interim role. The facilitator suggested if anyone has an intern that could help Senator Roberts with clerical work (e.g. inputting names into a data base, etc.), to please let her know.
- 3) The majority of the tables agreed to form a decision making/action group. Two of the tables agreed but put caveats on it which are reflected above in the notes. One table expressed hesitation for various reasons (above) and 1 table suggesting another model is to use existing groups and “stitch together” what they are doing. The structure of the group or the effort is to be decided.
- 4) Regardless of the model, a prioritization list needs to occur of action strategies.
- 5) A high priority is getting out information on the health of the river in a neutral, accurate, trusted and understand-able way(s).
- 6) Find common interests.
- 7) Set measurable goals and benchmarks.

Submitted by Marsha Porter-Norton, Facilitator

Community Meeting

Related to Gold King Mine Incident -- and Potential Community Response

Monday, August 31st, 2015 -- 10:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. -- Durango Public Library

Purposes of the meeting

- a) Hear from a group, RWEACT, working on post Wolf Creek fire issues
- b) See if our community might want to start a similar effort and if so, define next steps

Ground rules

- a) All opinions count even if you do not agree with them
- b) One person talks at a time

Agenda

- I) Introductions, State Senator Ellen Roberts (10)
- II) Purpose of the Meeting, State Senator Ellen Roberts (5)
- III) Format for the meeting, agenda, purpose and ground rules, Marsha Porter-Norton, Facilitator (5)
- IV) RWEACT Presentation (45 minutes), RWEACT Representatives
 - What is it? How did it form? What does it do?
 - Q&A
- V) Discussion: Opportunities and Ideas related to forming a Team post-Gold King Mine Incident (70 minutes) (break as necessary), All
 - Small Groups (25 minutes) (discuss questions in italics below)*
 - Small Groups report back key ideas (10 minutes)*
 - Large Group (35 minutes)*
 - *Is there interest in doing this?*
 - *If so, what are some key questions to address?*
 - *What would the purposes be...?*
 - *Who might serve on it?*
 - *Structure: Subcommittees? Other ideas?*
 - Leadership and meeting facilitation or coordination
 - Ideas on next steps, if any? Meeting schedule?
 - Other
- VI) Summary including any "Parking Lot" items, Marsha Porter-Norton (10 minutes)
- VII) Closing, State Senator Ellen Roberts (5 minutes)