

# **Animas River Community Forum**

(see purpose statement below in blue)

February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016

Meeting notes

## **Present**

Ann Oliver, Animas Watershed Partnership; Matt Thorpe, Barb Horn, Colorado Parks & Wildlife; Ben Martinez, USDA - San Juan National Forest; Buck Skillen and Chuck Wanner, Trout Unlimited – Five Rivers Chapter; Cathy Metz, City of Durango – Parks and Recreation Department; Celene Hawkins The Nature Conservancy; Chara Ragland, Consultant; Darlene Marcus for US Congressman Scott Tipton; John Whitney for Senator Michael Bennet; Justin Abernathy, Bureau of Land Management – Tres Rios Field Office; Kirstin Brown, Colorado Division of Reclamation Mine Safety; Laura Lewis Marchino Region 9 Economic Development District; Liane Jollon and Brian Devine, San Juan Basin Health Department; Marcie Bidwell and Esme Cadiente, Mountain Studies Institute; Peter Butler and Steve Fearn, Animas River Stakeholders Group; Rachael Hoffman, VISTA Volunteer – Animas Watershed Partnership; Russ Howard, Animas La-Plata Project O&M Replacement Assoc.; Sacha Smith, Southern Ute Indian Tribe; Tomas German-Palacios SW Colo. Comm. College – Economic and Workforce; Tom Schillci Videographer; Tom McNamara, La Plata County Office of Emergency Mgmt.; Ann McCoy-Harold, Senator Cory Gardner’s Office; Nicole Rowan (and three others), CDPHE by phone; Marwa Mohamed, Durango business owner and interested citizen; and Kimberly Johnson, Great Old Broads for the Wilderness. Facilitator: Marsha Porter-Norton.

## **Opening**

The Animas River Community Forum (ARCF) met for a bi-monthly meeting on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016. Everyone agreed to the meetings outcomes and agenda (see Attachment 1). It was noted that the presentation Peter Butler was planning to give had to be rescheduled because of the 4:00 p.m. vote being taken in Silverton re: Superfund. Peter was thanked for being flexible and Ben Martinez of the USFS was also thanked for allowing use of the San Juan Public Lands Center.

## **Monitoring Gap Team Update**

Ann Oliver, Animas Watershed Partnership, gave an update on the “Monitoring Gap Team.” All are welcome to join in. Their mission is assessing the health of the watershed (entire watershed) through the lens of public health, the public in general, and ecological resiliency. The first step in this process is determining what data is available and assessing where there are gaps, and then accessing the data. Ann said they will be bringing documents and work products back to the group for vetting, ideas, and reactions. If you would like to get involved, email Ann or the co-leader, Barb Horn, Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

## **Impacted Mining Streams Task Force**

Nicole Rowan, Andrew Ross, Aimee Konowal and Monica Sheets (and one other colleague?) were on the phone from the CDPHE (Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment). They said through CDPHE/Water Quality Control Division a statewide “Impacted Mining Streams Task Force” has formed. They are assessing the 230 mines in the state that are considered to be at risk. They will inspect each one and develop further action steps such as prioritization. Kirsten Brown, CDMRS (Colorado Division of Reclamation Mine Safety) said there is a list for Southwest Colorado (and specifically the Animas Watershed Basin) developed by her office and ARSG (Animas River Stakeholders Group) and that that list was given to the CDPHE to identify sites in our area. Both Nicole and Kristen agreed to provide maps of where the mines are located. Nicole also said that CDPHE is doing monitoring in the basin.

## **EPA Study on Sediment**

Brian Devine with the San Juan Basin Health Department gave a presentation on Fate and Transport of Sediment from the Gold King mine. The original EPA presentation on the topic is available at <http://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-02/documents/analysisfatetransportmetals.pdf>.

- The EPA has done a study, that is soon to be peer-reviewed, related to “fate and transport” (changes in form and movement downriver) of metals.
- This is not a SJBHD study, he clarified. He said that he just wanted the group to know of this study and to give highlights. The study is based on modeling and uses existing EPA and state datasets.
- At some point in March, EPA will hold a Webinar on their final study and everyone in the ARCF will be invited to be on it.
- The Gold King Mine incident sent 440 tons of metals down the river and 98% of them were solids. The SJBHD cares a lot about if metals are in solid or dissolved form. Dissolved metals are more reactive and more hazardous to human and animal life.
- Of this 440 tons, at Durango, 2.2 passed through in a 24-hour time period when the spill was occurring. For comparison, in a typical spring run off day, according to a USGS study done in '95-96, 2.5 tons of metals come down the river. So, one conclusion could be that the river was similar to a run off event in terms of loading.
- Roughly 50% of the metals were from the Gold King Mine itself and 50% from the force of water eroding the stream beds of Cement Creek bringing more metals into the flow.
- The water was acidic in the upper reaches and dissolved some metals. pH improved as water flowed downstream, and all of the dissolved metals had become solids again once the plume reached Farmington.
- Most of the solid metals settled out of the plume above Durango, and some of those have been remobilized to the river in storm events since August.
- As the plume went down river, more dilution occurred. However, after the river passes Aztec, metal loads actually increase (likely from other factors).
- Plume-derived sediment is a small fraction of the sediment in the river and this spring is unlikely to be very different, from a health perspective, from previous springs.

## **Spring Run Off 2016**

- It can be expected that during spring run off this year, the river will turn a different color (orange tinted). SJBHD and the affected counties are working together around communicating with the public, and, they are also working on a better initial response plan.
- The river being a different color is expected to be short lived.
- The recommendations from the SJBHD will be the same as they were after the river re-opened last fall. Brian said they will send out information to the group regarding what their public messages will be via a PSA.

## **Monitoring**

- It was stated by Brian that an interim monitoring plan is being put in place for the spring runoff. It will not be as robust as a long term monitoring plan due to funding. The Cooperative Agreements each entity is working out with the EPA are not expected to receive full funding but EPA has made available \$2 million to conduct monitoring starting this year.
- The SJBHD (along with the City, Tribe and County and MSI) will all be doing monitoring. Marcie with MSI clarified that monitoring and water quality sampling is two different things.
- SJBHD and partners will be doing “real time monitoring” at one or two stations. If the water chemistry changes to an unhealthy level, the upgraded notification system being developed will be used. The SJBHD is doing a risk communication plan so the public is aware of any unhealthy levels of metals. There will be triggers based on proxies for metals concentration in the river (i.e., such as, if pH drops and conductivity rises, there is a need for sampling and notification).
- Asked if cost was a barrier in getting a long term monitoring system set up, Brian and Liane Jollon said yes, absolutely. The plan they are putting in place is considered interim until they know how much funding they will get for the long term from the EPA.
- Others doing monitoring are: City of Durango; MSI; State Water Quality Control Division; and River Watch. (A full list of everyone doing monitoring was developed by the forum and is available on the Web site: [www.animasriverocmmunity.org](http://www.animasriverocmmunity.org) )
- The State is accepting comments on its monitoring plan now.

## *Discussion*

- 1) Comment: What the EPA sent out was not a study, it was a power point. When will the study be available? Answer, it should be soon. It is being peer reviewed this week.
- 2) Question: Will existing data be used in this? Brian said, no, they are not using existing data. The point was made that anyone who has existing data should/can share with the SJBHD.
- 3) Brian was asked if he has confidence in the EPA study? He said, yes that he does.
- 4) Comment: It would have been good to have the long term plan in place before this spring runoff. Brian said yes, that is true. However, due to the timing of when the local governments could be promised reimbursement by the EPA or at least know one way or another (aka

“Cooperative Agreements”) and due to the early nature of this year’s beginning run off because of warm weather, an interim plan is what could be accomplished for this year.

- 5) Education needs to happen now with unified messaging. SJBHD agreed to get a fact sheet and any information out to the group re: their messages/information so everyone can be unified.
- 6) Through grants recently received by MSI on behalf of the forum, there are funds to do education. Coordination has to occur so the Forum isn’t saying one thing and SJBHD (and others) saying another. All agreed. Also, it was pointed out that for the area it covers, SJBHD should be a central place for messaging to be coming from as the community(ies) probably look to SJBHD as a credible source for trusted information.
- 7) Comment: We have to be very careful not to scare the public with information that isn’t accurate.

### **Grants/Coordinator/Steering Committee**

Marcie Bidwell announced the two grants MSI had written for on behalf of the ARCF were awarded. The objectives and tasks are:

#### *OBJECTIVES*

ARCF’s overall objective is to: promote communication, coordination and collaborative action; foster public confidence; support resiliency in our communities; and enhance planning, improved public safety, and health for the future all while honoring the institutional authorities and decision making of governmental and community organizations. Specifically, we will:

1. Providing a bi-monthly forum for the communities of the Colorado Animas River to discuss issues, learn lessons, and build relationships necessary to recover from the Gold King Mine spill.
2. Organizing educational events and activities.
3. Working together to develop and maintain a Web site and other tools to share information.
4. Sharing with other parts of Colorado and the Rocky Mountain West.
5. Measuring and documenting success.

#### *TASKS*

The Animas River Community Forum will execute four main tasks: Task 1 – Gold King Mine Spill Long-term Solutions, Task 2 – Community and Stakeholder Education, Task 3 – Monitoring and Data Gaps Assessment, Task 4 – Project and Coalition Management and Reporting. Please refer to our proposal for complete descriptions of the methods, techniques, and sequencing to be used. Tasks 1-3 will be managed by the Part-time coordinator (Task 4).

The funds include \$37,850 from the Southwest Basin Roundtable (CWCB Water Supply Reserve Account) and \$17,000 in match from the Southwestern Water Conservation District. (Note: more matches can be gathered so let Marcie know if your entity can provide any match.) A steering committee has been put in place including: State Senator Ellen Roberts; Liane Jollan

(SJBHD); Ann Oliver (Animas Watershed Partnership); Matt Thorpe (CPW); and a Silverton/San Juan County representative (formerly Anthony Edwards and now to be determined). It was agreed that Peter Butler would be added from ARSG along with a representative of a group in Silverton who has been working on these issues, post-spill (Laura Lewis Marchino of Region 9 will currently represent that group until and if they appoint someone else). Marcie said it would be good to get another government representative.

It is hoped a coordinator can be hired by April but interim help will be needed. An RFQ for a 30/hour/month coordinator will be distributed soon by MSI and everyone was asked to help distribute it. (Reminder: The group previously made a decision to stay together until the one-year anniversary conference or approximately the one-year anniversary of the event, and to reassess the long-term need and viability of the group at that time.)

Marcie and MSI were thanked for working on these grants for the group.

### **Announcements**

- 1) Ty Churchwell with TU said the San Juan Clean Water Coalition is launching officially with a kick off on Monday, February 29<sup>th</sup> at Animas Brewing at 5:00 p.m. This group is working on passing Good "Sam" and supporting clean waters for the San Juan Mountains.  
[www.sanjuancleanwater.org](http://www.sanjuancleanwater.org)
- 2) Laura Lewis Marchino, with Region 9 EDD (Economic Development District) said that a stakeholder group in Silverton/San Juan County convened and is looking to hire an economic coordinator to deal with the many issues related to Super Fund if part of the area is listed (e.g. transportation, workforce, housing). The San Juan Development Corporation will be the place the person will through. She is Region 9's liaison with this group.
- 3) Tomas German-Palacios, SW Colo. Comm. College - Economic and Workforce, said the grant he mentioned at an earlier meeting which was targeted to workforce issues in Superfund-identified areas has not been applied for but SWCC hopes to do in 2017. The grantors said it is too soon but it is still on SWCC's task list.

Submitted by Marsha Porter-Norton, Facilitator

**Attachment 1**  
**Animas River Community Forum**  
*(see purpose statement on page 2)*  
**Monday, February 22, 2016 – 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.**  
**San Juan Public Lands Center, 15 Burnett Court, Durango, Colorado**  
**(REVISED)**

Purposes of the meeting

- a) Sharing of information, ideas and opportunities including project updates
- b) Moving forward on increasing capacity

Ground rules

- ◆ All opinions count even if you do not agree with them
- ◆ One person talks at a time
- ◆ Keep focused on the future, on collaborative efforts, on what we can do *together*

Agenda

- I. Introductions
- II. Purpose and outcomes of this meeting, and ground rules, Marsha Porter-Norton, Facilitator
- III. *Looking Ahead to Spring Run Off:*
  - Brian Devine, San Juan Basin Health Department. Mr. Devine will present a summary of the EPA's findings from their fate and transport of metals study that was presented in draft form to local governments and public health recently. This is a sampling and modeling exercise that provides numbers from August 2015 and helps everyone understand what can be expected during spring runoff. (20)
  - Discussion of community education needed before spring run-off and potential next steps (15)
- IV. *Updates from the Monitoring Gap Team*, Ann Oliver, Animas Watershed Partnership and Barb Horn, Colorado Parks and Wildlife: The team will give an update on their meetings and next steps; and relay how their group interfaces with the group formed at the State level (Mining Impacted Streams Task Force); and answer questions. (15)
- V. *Increasing Capacity:* Process for hiring a coordinator, Marcie Demmy Bidwell, Executive Director of MSI. She will give an update on 2 grants recently received for the ARCF and propose a process for hiring of a coordinator. The group will determine next steps. (15)
- VII. Updates (10)
- VIII. Summary and Next Meeting Date, Marsha Porter-Norton

## **“Animas River Community Forum”**

### **Purpose Statement**

*In response to the Gold King Mine spill incident, the Animas River Community Forum came together.*

*Its purpose is to:*

- \* promote communication, coordination and collaborative action;*
- \* foster public confidence;*
- \* support resiliency in our communities; and*
- \* enhance planning, improved public safety and health for the future*  
*all while*  
*honoring the institutional authorities and decision making of*  
*governmental and community organizations.*

*We will do this through:*

- Providing a bi-monthly forum for the communities of the Colorado Animas River to discuss issues, learn, and build relationships.*
  - Organizing educational events and activities.*
- Working together to develop and maintain a Web site and other tools to share information.*
  - Sharing with other parts of Colorado and the Rocky Mountain West.*
  - Measuring and documenting success.*

*The forum works on issues that have agreement among forum members and looks to the future.*

*Approved November 2015*